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The
FLAPPER
WIFE

BEATRICE BURTON

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by
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THE FLAPPER WIFE

CHAPTER I

It was the last night of Gloria's girlhood.

To-morrow would be her wedding day!

With troubled eyes she stood looking down at the white satin dress spread out on her bed.

It had been worn by two other brides . . . her grandmother and, later, her own mother.

"But I certainly don't intend to have the kind of life they had!" Gloria shook her bobbed head at the white walls of her room.

. . . Her dead grandmother, whose work-worn hands had raised ten children!

Ten children! Think of it . . . Gloria shuddered.

"Not for me!" she said aloud. "Not if I know myself!"

Of course, Dick might want children. He probably would. Most men did want them. Why not, since they had none of the bother and pain of having them?

They could go on living their lives while the wives lost sleep and freshness caring for the children.

They could rush about, doing as they pleased. For their women were safe at home, chained to the cradle . . .

No, she was not going to have babies! Not even one!

So that was that!

Then Gloria's thoughts flew downstairs to the sitting room. She knew her mother was there in the old rocker, mending stockings. She was always mending. And still the basket was always full. It held an endless job.

Poor Mother! How hard she worked!

There was nothing for her but housework and her family, year after year. Ye gods, what a life!

. . . A woman was either a slave or a doll.

But if she was a slave, it was her own fault. And that's all there was to it.

Gloria had made up her mind that she was through with

hard work, forever, last week when she had said good-by to her typewriter and her job.

Gloria lifted the old wedding dress from the bed, and put it on a clothes hanger in the closet. But the silk was heavy and the dress slid off into a heap on the floor.

"Mother!" Gloria called downstairs. "Will you come up here right away? I want you to help me with this tricky dress. It keeps falling off the hanger."

Gloria Gordon's mother was a small brown wren of a woman. All her life she had "babied" her beautiful daughter.

Now she hung the dress neatly in the closet. Then she turned down Gloria's bed, and put a hot water bottle between the sheets.

"Dear me, Gloria," she fretted, "I don't know how you're ever going to get along without me to take care of you, when you're married and gone!"

"Don't you worry about me," the girl answered, "I'll be taken care of all right. That's what I meant to-day when I told you I didn't want to learn anything about housework. You see, if I don't know how to do it, Dick will have to hire a maid for me right from the start."

She set her lovely mouth in a firm red line.

"I had different ideas when I was a bride," Mrs. Gordon said quietly. "I thought a woman ought to help her husband."

"I know you did. Your idea of married life was to take care of your husband. Mine is that he is to take care of me!" Gloria shrilled. "Where you ran a carpet sweeper I'm going to run an automobile!"

"I've made up my mind that I'm going to be Dick's sweetheart . . . not his housekeeper. I'm going to stay in bed every day till noon, and keep my looks and my husband!"

She crossed the room to her dressing table. She leaned forward and studied her face in the mirror.

She knew that she was beautiful. She had red-gold hair and dark eyes and lashes. Her skin was smooth and white as a gardenia. And the forces that had modeled her features had made them clear and fine.

But behind this sweet and womanly mask, she was wildly discontented and eager for life. And Life—with a capital L—was beginning to-morrow with her wedding day!

To-morrow she would burst forth like a butterfly from its

cocoon, and fly away—away from this shabby house, and the alarm clock that had wrenched her from sleep at seven every morning for the last two years—away from the necessity of working six days a week as typist for a real estate firm.

And mixed up with Gloria's love for Dick Gregory was an enormous gratitude toward him for taking her away from all this to a life of ease with him.

At least, Gloria intended that it should be ease . . . and luxury, too. She was tired of penny-pinching and hard work, dead tired.

A job and a business career were all very well in their way for girls who weren't beautiful and desirable . . . girls whom men didn't want.

But with a face like hers . . . ! Then she turned out the lights above the dressing-table.

She climbed into bed, pulled the covers around her shoulders, and sleepily kissed her mother good night.

Two hours later she sat up in bed wide awake, with the feeling that some one had called her.

She listened. No sound in the darkened house.

Then suddenly she heard a low "Bob White" whistle out of doors.

Dick!

She swung her feet over the side of the bed, and flew to the window. There he stood down on the moonlit lawn. She heard him laugh as she threw up the window.

"It's our wedding day," he said. "Ten minutes after twelve! How's my bride?"

"Oh, Dick, how wicked of you!" Gloria said, exasperated. "Don't you know it's bad luck to see your bride on your wedding day before the preacher makes her yours? And besides, what will the neighbors think if they see you?"

"Oh, bother the neighbors! They won't be your neighbors after to-morrow, anyway," Dick replied in a stage whisper. "Look here, I want to kiss you. . . . I've been thinking about you all evening during that doggoned bachelor dinner . . ."

With a bang, Gloria shut the window, and went back to bed.

She lay there waiting for the sound of Dick's departing roadster. But there was no sound anywhere except the lonesome shriek of a train in the distance.

At last she got up and looked out of the window. Dick hadn't moved. He was still waiting for his kiss.

Gloria opened the window.

"Why in the world don't you go home?" she asked crossly.

Dick didn't answer at once. He stood twirling his hat in his hands.

"Oh, have a heart, Gloria," he said finally. "Come on down to the front door for just a minute. . . . I must kiss you, dear! Think, it's our wedding day."

Gloria hesitated. After all, where was the harm in one little kiss in the dead of night? In another twelve hours they would be man and wife.

"All right, I'll be right down," she whispered.

She put on her bathrobe and thrust her bare feet into slippers. She tiptoed out into the hall.

Halfway down the stairs she paused.

This was not the thing to do! She was making herself cheap . . . "easy." The way to hold a man was to keep him guessing. To kiss him so seldom that love-making would never lose its tang and flavor. . . .

A man was a born hunter. He loved the chase. As soon as he got what he wanted he was off at top speed for something else, for somebody else!

Well, she would keep Dick running after her! She would never go to him as she was going now! Never!

She turned and ran back to her room.

"Dick!" she called softly from the window. He came out from the shadow of the porch.

"Darling, I'm not coming down," Gloria said, "I just can't. It wouldn't be right. You shouldn't have asked me to do such a horrid thing!"

Without answering, Dick crossed the lawn and started his car.

Gloria lay in bed listening to the sound of it. She heard it for a long time, and she knew that Dick had driven out to take one last look at the house he had built for her.

What a boy he was!

At twenty, she was more worldly wise than Dick, in spite of his thirty years and his reputation as a lawyer.

He was like wax in her hands. She could make him utterly miserable by refusing him a kiss. And when she was

tender he would willingly go through fire and water for her! He said so.

. . . When she did kiss him, she was never thrilled by it. What excited her was the power that kiss gave her over him!

Yes, Dick was mad about her. He would give her anything she asked for. And she was not going to be slow in asking for the things she wanted . . . leisure, love and luxury. But above all, luxury!

CHAPTER II

GLORIA's first thought the next morning was "This is my wedding day."

Her second was "This is the last morning I shall have to wake up in this dingy old room, thank goodness!"

She hated everything in it, from the battered brass bed to the imitation ivory toilet set.

By to-morrow morning she would be the wife of a man who could buy her wonderful things . . . a toilet set of silver, perfumes, lacy handkerchiefs, chiffon stockings too thin ever to be mended!

She had made up her mind that her honeymoon would be a shopping trip, too. With Dick to pay the bills!

"Sweetheart," Dick had said, "let's honeymoon in some quiet place where we can be alone." But she had laughed him to scorn.

"Don't you know you can be lonelier in a big city than anywhere else in the world, silly?" she had asked. "I've decided on Montreal. It's romantic, but it's full of lovely shops and restaurants. And we shall stop at the Ritz . . . and be very smart and Ritzy!"

Dick had laughed. And she had her way.

So when a certain train rolled across the country that November night, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Gregory were on it. Their drawing room was packed with brides' roses.

"You're like a rose, yourself, my little Gloria! All mine at last!" Dick murmured. His arms held her close. His eager lips pressed down hungrily upon hers that were so smooth and cool.

Her honeymoon was the most wonderful time of Gloria's life. She slept the mornings away, and breakfasted elegantly at noon.

In the afternoons she and Dick hired a fiacre to take them far up the steep road to Mount Royal, or out into the country.

They ate in quaint little French restaurants.

And Gloria shopped!

She bought beads and earrings and more than a dozen bottles of French perfume, while Dick stayed in the hotel reading.

Gloria had never known any one who read so much as he.

"For a rising young lawyer, you're quite a high-brow, it seems to me," she said one morning.

She was lying back in a long chair while the hotel hairdresser marceled her reddish gold hair. She laughed almost scornfully.

Dick made no answer. He sat down and picked up a book, only to put it down. He filled his pipe and laid it, unlighted, on the dresser.

"Come here, restless soul, I want to talk to you," Gloria held out to him a slim hand. "Do you know, it's awfully cold out doors? I nearly froze yesterday. I need a coat. I'd like a fur one. I've been looking at one in that little shop down the street . . ."

Her voice trailed off. The hairdresser had finished her work and was putting her iron and brushes away in a little black bag. Gloria paid her.

The moment the door had closed behind her, Dick came across the room. He put his hands under Gloria's elbows, holding her away from him.

"Look here, please don't have people hanging around here all the time," he said. "You're beautiful enough without having your hair curled every time the wind blows. I want you alone, all to myself. . . ."

With sudden passion he pulled her to him, and kissed her eyelids, her mouth, the little hollow of her throat.

"Wonderful! Beautiful!" he said. His voice was choked and queer.

Gloria could feel the beating of his heart against her own, and the quivering of his hands.

With one of her own she pushed him away from her. She smoothed down her ruffled hair.

"Do you think you can afford the coat? It's four hundred dollars . . . the one I want, dear," she said coolly. "It's a jacket of Siberian squirrel."

She laced her fingers at the back of his neck, and held her face up to his. "Say you'll get it for me," she said.

Without a word Dick nodded and turned away. He picked up his pipe and his book.

"I'm going down to the men's lounge for a while," he said shortly. "I'll meet you at the elevator at two. We'll hunt up a new place for lunch, shall we?"

And so it happened that the new Mrs. Richard Gregory came home from her honeymoon wearing a costly fur coat, fragrant with scent.

They went to dinner that first night with Dick's father and mother in the old homestead.

"Roly-poly pudding!" said Dick when Maggie, the maid, brought in the dessert, "I'll bet Mother made it just for me."

"She certainly did," answered old Mr. Gregory. Mrs. Gregory beamed at Gloria.

"Dick sometimes has nervous indigestion, as you probably know, my dear," she said in her rich contralto voice, "and when he has an attack, I always cook everything for him myself . . . very carefully. You undoubtedly will, too."

"I can't cook," Gloria said in a very small voice. "I can't cook at all."

Mother Gregory frowned. Then her wide brow cleared.

"You will learn," she smiled comfortably. "You will learn."

And Gloria smiled back with her ripe lips. But there was no smile in her amber eyes. They were like pools of water that no sunlight has warmed.

. . . She would never learn to cook! She would never be a household drudge, her hands shriveled with washing dishes. Her nails broken. Her dresses smudged with pastry flour. . . . If Dick's mother thought this was the kind of girl her son had married, she was jolly well mistaken!

Gloria widened her eyes. She turned to Mother Gregory.

"By the way, I'll need a cook right away," she said sweetly. "I wonder if Maggie would know of any one who wants a place. If Dick has a weak stomach, my efforts at cooking would kill him, most likely."

After dinner she and Dick walked home to the new house. It was white with green shutters, and it nestled among the evergreens that surrounded it. Everything in it was fresh and new. Dick and she had spent happy months buying furniture for it.

"I say, Gloria, I wonder if we can afford a cook," Dick began the first of what Gloria later called his "economy sermons."

They had just come into the little house. Gloria switched on the lights and sighed with joy. The house with its Chinese rugs and yellow silk curtains was a dream. A dream come true!

"Afford a cook? Why, of course, we can afford a cook," she said.

It was absurd that a successful lawyer couldn't afford a cook for his wife!

"I'm not so sure," Dick said. He set their bags on the floor and dropped into a chair.

"You see, dearest," he went on, "the furniture isn't quite paid for. And our honeymoon sent a thousand dollars to the four winds. Then, there was the fur coat I gave you . . ."

"Well, for goodness' sake, what did you want to get married for, if you couldn't afford to keep up a home?" Gloria asked with sudden fury. She was tired, and she was sure that Dick's mother hated her.

"Your mother thinks that I ought to spend my whole life cooking, so you think so, too! Well, I'm not going to . . . d'you hear? I'm not going to fry all the color out of my cheeks standing over a red-hot stove for hours and days and years . . ." Gloria's voice rose in a scream.

Then she burst into wild sobbing and ran upstairs.

She threw herself on the bed in their room, and waited for Dick to come to her. She wanted him to comfort her, to forgive her, and to tell her she could have a cook.

But he didn't come. She listened. No step on the stairs.

Then Gloria began to laugh. Not as she had ever laughed before in all her life, but with great gasps that shook her from head to foot.

And as she laughed tears rolled down her face.

. . . All at once she was aware of Dick standing at the foot of the bed. He had a big pitcher in his hands. Then she felt the sting of ice water in her face!

It choked and blinded her. But she went on laughing and crying. She tried to stop. She couldn't stop!

Presently she heard the low rumble of Dick's roadster under her windows. . . And the next thing she knew it was broad daylight. She lay in her own bed, very tired and hungry.

"What's happened?" she asked herself. For she felt blue and unhappy as if something dreadful were hanging over her. Then she remembered last night.

"Dick!" Gloria called. "Oh, Dick!"

Immediately he appeared in the doorway. His face was covered with lather, and he held a shaving brush.

"Dick Gregory, why did you throw that water into my face last night?" Gloria asked. Dick grinned.

"Because I thought you had hysterics, and I guessed right," he cheerfully answered. "I went out and got Doc Seymour, and he gave you some pills to put you to sleep, or you'd probably be crying yet . . . or laughing. I'll admit that the laughing got my goat."

"Well, don't you ever dare to throw one drop of water at me ever again, no matter what I do," Gloria said solemnly, "or I'll walk right out of this house and never come back. D'you understand?"

Instantly he was beside her bed holding her close, stroking her perfumed hair.

"Darling, I was a brute to do it, but I'd always heard that ice water was a sure cure for hysterics . . ."

Dick stopped talking and put a finger to his lips in warning. From the stairway came the tinkle of dishes and the aromatic smell of fresh coffee.

Maggie, Mother Gregory's maid, walked into the room carrying a huge tray!

"Here she is! The world's best cook!" Dick said with a flourish. "Mother has promised to lend Maggie to us for a few weeks, until you get your bearings, Gloria."

"Indeed, I wanted to come, Mr. Dick," Maggie said heartily.

"I phoned Mother last night that you were ill, and Maggie came over first thing this morning," Dick explained when the door had closed upon Maggie's broad back. "And she sent word that you are not to worry about her. She says she can get along beautifully, alone, for a few weeks."

It had not occurred to Gloria to worry about Dick's mother in a maidless house. She seemed so large and capable . . . so adequate to any of the small worries of life.

There was breakfast for two on the big tray . . . chilled grapefruit, shirred eggs, and coffee with thick cream.

Gloria beamed at Dick over the rim of her cup. Her eyes were soft as a child's, once more.

"Darling, I was dreadful last night, wasn't I? Tell me I don't deserve such a duck of a husband," she cooed. She

patted Dick's big hand. She was yielding and adorable now that she actually had a cook in the house.

For she had had her own way, as she always had since the day she was born!

"I'm afraid my Gloria is a spoiled child," Dick said, but his voice was deep with love.

"Next time she has a tantrum I'm going downtown and play poker all night with the boys," he finished.

Gloria gave a gasp of surprise. This from Dick!

"Just you try staying out nights!" she cried. "Just you try to pull anything like that on me! Do you know what I'll do?"

Dick laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, what would you do if I committed such a crime?" he asked. "Break a butter dish, or something like that?"

"I'd be off in a flutter of dust, right back to my mother and father! And you could keep bachelor's hall here all by your lonesome," Gloria told him. "I'm not going to be like poor Lola Hough, waiting alone night after night for Bill to stop gambling and stagger home!"

She meant what she said. She'd show him a thing or two!

Lola Hough, with her tired wrinkled face, might have to take such treatment patiently. But she, herself, didn't. Not for a minute! With her looks!

. . . Besides she knew she could manage Dick. He was helpless, because of his love for her.

CHAPTER III

As soon as Dick had left for the office, Gloria put on her kimono and went downstairs. In the kitchen Maggie was singing "Mother Machree" as she washed dishes.

"Maggie," Gloria said politely, "I'd like you to plan all the meals while you're here, and order the food, as well. Will that be too much extra work for you?"

Maggie considered.

"Mrs. Gregory told me I was to come here to teach you to cook and keep house," she answered. "She always does her own marketing. And she can cook the grandest meals!"

"I know," Gloria said, "but I'm different. I don't know a thing about running a house. I couldn't plan a meal if my life depended on it. And I wouldn't know a tender chicken from one as old as the hills."

She laid her manicured hand pleadingly on Maggie's rough one.

She knew that the older woman was flattered by this offer of new dignity and power.

"All right," Maggie said finally, "I'll do it for you."

Gloria breathed a smile of relief. She ran upstairs and started the steaming water for her bath. There was a large bottle of rose bath-salts on the glass shelf beside the tub.

Gloria threw in two big handfuls. The bath-water began to smell like a Persian garden.

Out in her bedroom the French clock on the dressing-table chimed.

Twelve o'clock!

A month ago twelve o'clock would have found her out on the avenue, on her way to lunch with hundreds of other pretty girls who worked for a living.

Now she was Mrs. Richard Gregory, pampered and idle. She hadn't a trouble in the world! Her greatest worry was to decide what kind of earrings to wear with the dress she had chosen for that day.

Ah, this was the life . . . this was what she was born for! She smiled at her glowing face in the glass, as she rubbed perfume behind her pink ears.

The telephone rang.

"Hello, sweet thing!" It was May Seymour's light voice that came over the wire. "I heard you were home. How's married life?"

"Wonderful, of course! You should just see all the things I bought in Montreal! Come over, can't you? I have the darlingest bottle of perfume for you—Chinese water lily. Right from Paris it came!" Gloria said.

"I'll be right over to get it," May laughed. And by the time Gloria was dressed, May's smart little car was at her door.

Gloria brought treasure after treasure from the unpacked trunk . . . lip sticks that were indelible, geranium rouge, stockings the color of sunburnt skin, a three-strand pearl necklace, and the new fur coat.

She held the coat up for May to admire.

"My dear, you remind me of the Queen of Sheba, and nobody else but!" May exclaimed in her cheerful slangy way. "I've got to trot along now—I have a heavy date with the hairdresser. But first I'm going to open this wonderful perfume you've given me, and douse it all over my coat. Mmm! Isn't that the most heavenly smell? . . . Just think, angel, you wouldn't have all this sudden wealth if it hadn't been for me!"

It was true. For Gloria had met Dick through May and her husband.

May and Gloria had gone to business college together. Then May had found a job in Dr. John Seymour's office and had married him. And at one of their parties, Gloria had first seen big, quiet Dick Gregory, and had marked him for her own.

Her eyes were dreamy as she thought of that long-ago night. . . . Dick had driven her home from the party, and had roughly kissed her good-night at the door.

She had known instantly that he meant it . . . that he was not just "petting."

"I can marry that man!" she had told her mirror that night,

with the memory of Dick's hard kiss still on her mouth. "I can marry that man and all his money, if I want to!"

Well, she had wanted to . . . and so she had married him.

After May had gone, Gloria put on her hat and the new fur coat to go to see her mother. She hadn't telephoned her since she had come home.

"Don't bother about getting lunch for me," she told Maggie, "I ate a big breakfast, and I'm afraid of getting fat."

"Have just a cup of tea and a bit of salad," Maggie said. She couldn't understand these women who were afraid to eat, lest they gain a few pounds. She thought they'd all look better if they had a little flesh on their bones.

But Gloria shook her head.

As she walked down the street, she met Lola Hough.

She was wheeling a baby buggy with one hand and carrying a market basket with the other. Behind her trotted the twins, Billy and Betty.

Lola's tired face was wreathed with smiles under her last year's hat.

"How nice to see you!" She kissed Gloria warmly. "Are you all settled in your lovely new house? I walked past it the other day, and I thought how lovely that big back yard will be for your babies—when they come."

Gloria raised her eyebrows.

"I hope you're not going to be one of these foolish women who can't be bothered with having children," Lola said. She had caught the look on Gloria's face at the word "babies."

"Because they're not a bother! They're the greatest fun in the world," Lola went on. "A woman thinks she loves her husband. But she doesn't even guess what love is until she has a baby."

Lola raised the hood of the buggy. Inside, in a little nest of pillows, lay Teddy Hough, who was not quite a year old. His long lashes lay in a dark shadow on his cheeks. Little gold wisps of hair curled from under his bonnet.

"Isn't he a love?" Lola asked.

"Nice baby," was all Gloria could find to say. She said good-by then and walked on.

The little house of her girlhood looked shabbier than ever before when she came down the street. The paint was scaling in places, and the snowy lace curtains had been darned in

a dozen places. A card tacked up beside the doorbell, read: "Bell out of order. Please knock."

Gloria knocked. Her mother opened the door. The minute she saw her daughter she began to cry.

"Whatever in the world's the matter, Mother?" Gloria asked. She pushed the door shut, and patted her mother's gingham shoulder with one hand in its white kid glove.

"Oh, I don't know," her mother sobbed. "I guess I'm so happy at seeing you married off so well to such a good man that I just have to have a good cry."

She wiped her eyes with one corner of her white apron.

"You've always been a worry to your dad and me, Gloria," she went on. "All your life. You were too pretty always. And you began to have beaus when you were too young for them. . . . Then, last year we were deadly afraid that you were going to run away with that good-for-nothing actor. . . . What was his name?"

"Stanley Wayburn," Gloria answered promptly. "But you needn't have worried about him. He didn't want to marry any one who didn't have a million dollars!"

Stanley Wayburn was still a bitter memory in her heart.

He was the one man who had never lost his head over her. He had told her frankly that he would never marry for anything but money. But he was perfectly willing to make love to her, Gloria, in the meantime. Only he wouldn't fall in love with her . . . had finally stopped phoning her or taking her out to supper.

And then, at the end of the season, he had left town without a word. She remembered how she had cried all night. . . . What a fool she had been to care for him!

Mrs. Gordon was enchanted with Gloria's new fur coat.

"Dick's a fine husband," she said. "So don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Don't run him into debt! . . . By the way, that good-for-nothing Wayburn is back in town. I see by the papers that he is heading a new stock company."

"Is that so?" Gloria asked innocently. But her heart leaped. Stan Wayburn here, playing! And this was matinée day!

Gloria glanced at her wrist watch. Two o'clock. . . . If she hurried she could get to the theater in fifteen minutes.

"Well, I must be going. I just stopped in on my way downtown to see Dick," she fibbed, and kissed her mother good-by.

On the way to the theater she bought a bunch of violets and pinned them to her coat.

The house was sold out except for two chairs in an upper box. Gloria bought one of them. Just as she entered the box the curtain went up.

The play was a western one.

When Wayburn walked out onto the stage with his spurs clanking, Gloria leaned forward. She wanted to call out to him. "Hello there, Stan! It's Gloria!"

For she felt sure he would never recognize shabby Gloria Gordon in the bejeweled, befurred creature she had become. . . .

Just then Wayburn looked up. He looked straight at her. And he smiled.

A few minutes after the curtain had gone down on the first act an usher came into the box. He gave Gloria a folded sheet of paper.

"You are Miss Gordon, aren't you?" he asked. Gloria nodded.

"Gloria dear. It's good to see you again. Can't you run down to my dressing-room for a minute or two? The boy will show you the way," the note read. It was signed "Stan."

Gloria took her gold pencil from her bag.

"I can't come. I'm not Gloria Gordon any more. I'm married," she wrote on the back of the note Wayburn had sent up to her.

Then she hesitated. Should she send it? Or should she run down to see him?

After all, would it be so very wrong to see Stanley Wayburn in his dressing-room for five minutes?

Well, and what if it was wrong? Dick would probably never hear of it anyhow.

And Gloria longed to see Wayburn . . . If only to dazzle him with her new splendor. To show him that even if he hadn't wanted to marry her, another man had . . . a man who could afford to give her fur coats and diamonds and Parma violets in the middle of winter.

She rose to her feet.

"Take me to Mr. Wayburn," she said to the waiting usher.

The actor was waiting for her inside his room that had a tin star tacked on the door.

"Stan!" she breathed.

Before she knew what was happening she was in his arms. The smell of the Turkish cigarettes that he always smoked struck her nostrils as he kissed her again and again.

At last Gloria pushed him away. Her cheeks were scarlet.

"You shouldn't have done that!" she cried. "I'm married."

"So that's it!" Wayburn said. His eyes swept her from her \$50 hat to her shoes with their silver buckles. "When I saw you up in the box I wondered what you were using for money this year. . . . Who is the bloated millionaire you've married?"

"Richard Gregory, the lawyer," Gloria answered. "Ever hear of him?"

Wayburn nodded.

"I didn't know he was so darned rich," he said.

"Oh, we're not rich . . . just comfortably well off," Gloria told him. "We've a darling little house, and an automobile and a maid. I have everything I want, really."

"I'll just jot that address down. I'll be out some day soon to see you, to have a quiet talk over old times," Stan told her.

He wrote Gloria's address in a small leather book on his dressing table.

"If you should come, make it Thursday," Gloria said.

Thursday was Maggie's afternoon out. She did not want Maggie to be there when Stanley Wayburn came to call. She would take no chances on having Dick or Dick's mother find out that she was having a handsome man calling on her . . . less than three weeks after her wedding, at that!

. . . Not that there was anything wrong in seeing Wayburn. She would make him behave himself when he came. But people would be sure to misunderstand . . . if they found out.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY Thursday afternoon Gloria was all dressed.

She stood before the long mirror in her bedroom, trying to see herself with Stan Wayburn's eyes.

Under the crown of her golden-red hair her face was very pale. And the Cupid's bow of her mouth was rouged to the soft red of a geranium.

Gloria had put on an afternoon dress she had bought on her honeymoon. It was a clinging thing, the color of new green leaves.

Dick had told her that she looked like a wood-nymph in it. The doorbell rang loudly.

As she ran downstairs Gloria laughed maliciously.

She would give Stan Wayburn this glimpse of her in her beautiful house. She would let him see how her husband cherished her . . . like a jewel in its casket . . . And then she would send him away. She would be cold and distant.

She would make him suffer as she had suffered when he had cast her aside like an old glove, more than a year ago!

Stanley Wayburn looked all around him as he came into the living-room.

His ice-blue eyes took in the long room with its cream walls, its Chinese rugs, its gay cushions and lamps. There was a tea table drawn up beside the fire.

"So this is what little Russet has sold herself for!" Stanley said. "For a saucer of cream and a cushion by the fire . . . like a kitten!"

"Sold myself? What do you mean?" Gloria asked. She was stirred by the word "Russet" on Wayburn's lips. It was what he had called her long ago when he had made love to her.

"I mean that you don't love this husband of yours," Wayburn said. "You love me. You always have."

Gloria dropped her eyes.

"If you knew that," she said, "if you knew I loved you a

year ago, why did you treat me as you did? You didn't even say good-by when you went."

As soon as she had said it she wished she hadn't . . . this was not the way to keep Wayburn in his place . . .

His voice went on.

"Because I knew the sort of woman you were. I knew that this was the kind of life you wanted. I knew I couldn't afford to give you the things you wanted. . . . Oh, the world is full of your sort of women, Gloria. They want everything. They take everything. And they give nothing . . . nothing at all!"

Gloria laughed scornfully.

"It seems to me I have a faint recollection of your saying you wouldn't marry any one who didn't have a mint of money, yourself!" she cried. "That was where I learned my lesson of 'take all, give nothing.' From you! . . . And now you'd better go!"

Her voice was choked with fury. Tears of anger stood in her topaz eyes. To Wayburn she had never seemed so lovely.

"All right, I'll go," he said, coming across the yellow rug toward her chair, "but first I'll take this . . . and this . . . and this!"

He kissed her violently, brutally.

Gloria leaned back in his arms and hit him full in the face. . . . Then he was gone.

She rose from her chair and went into the sunroom to watch him go down the street.

And the first thing she saw was Dick's gray roadster swinging into the drive!

Gloria rushed upstairs. She tore off the green dress as she went. She slipped into a linen house frock. She was back in the living-room by the time Dick had put his car in the garage.

"Hello, there!" he said when he came in. "Who was the sheik I saw leaving the house as I came up the street?"

Gloria didn't answer at once.

Suddenly Dick seemed very dear. He was no love-pirate spending his time trying to win the forbidden love of every woman he saw . . . but a good man who loved her with all his soul. Could she tell him a lie?

Gloria rushed to him and hid her head against his breast. She kissed his necktie. . . .

"Who was the man I saw?" Dick asked again. His deep gray eyes were very serious. Gloria drew a long breath.

"Oh, that was Mr. What's-His-Name . . . the man I bought my lamp shades from, that's who it was," she said. "He put the wrong kind of silk in them. . . . I wanted them to be georgette crêpe. He used taffeta. . . . What brings you home so early?"

"You," Dick said. "I knew it was Maggie's day out and I thought we'd go somewhere for supper . . . How would that suit you?"

His eyes were thoughtful. Gloria wondered if he had believed the lie she had just told him about Wayburn.

The lie lay heavily on her mind.

Long after Dick had gone to sleep that night she lay awake thinking about it.

She had told thousands of little fibs in her twenty years . . . "white lies." But this one had been different. She had told it because she was afraid, and ashamed, of the thing she had done . . . of letting Stan Wayburn make love to her in Dick's house. It had been a despicable lie. . . .

Oh, well, perhaps all married women told them. That is, if they were going to have any fun and excitement. For toeing the mark was very dull.

There was May Seymour, for instance. A fine time May would have if she stayed home waiting for Dr. John to take her out! He was never home, day or night . . . the busiest doctor in town. . . . What was wrong, under the circumstances, for May to go out driving or lunching with other men . . . with Jim Carewe, in particular? And suppose the gossips did talk about her? . . . They were probably jealous of the good times she had!

With this comforting thought, Gloria laid her bright head on the pillow and was asleep.

At ten the next morning May telephoned.

"If you aren't doing anything special to-day, let's go downtown and bat around," she said. "I've got to buy some new cream for the dear old face. I'm getting crow's feet. Fancy that, sweet cookie! At my age! . . . Can you go with me?"

Gloria said she could. An hour later she and May were rolling downtown in May's little car.

"Aren't you ever going to drive Dick's car?" May asked.

"I guess not. He takes it every morning, himself," Gloria answered.

"Well, don't let him get away with that stuff. Just let him learn to use the street car, right from the start . . . or walk," May advised her.

"Better still, make him buy you a little car of your own for bridge parties and luncheons," May went on, inspired. "You'll never get anything in this world if you don't ask for it. I've found that out!"

An hour later they were sitting in their favorite restaurant.

"I love to eat down here," May said. "When I'm at home for lunch I never can eat a bite. . . . It gives me the blues just to be there, alone."

Gloria wasn't listening. She was wondering if she could make Dick buy her a car. She was pretty sure she could . . . she felt sure that she could manage him, make him do anything she wanted to do . . . so long as she paid him in the coin of her kisses, kept his senses enthralled.

She looked at May critically. May was coarsening. She wore too much rouge. . . . May was smiling with narrowed eyes at some one across the restaurant.

And in a minute or two, Gloria saw Jim Carewe leave his table near the wall and cross the room toward them.

Jim Carewe was one of May's old flames. The town gossips said he was still in love with her.

"Don't you girls want to go for a nice long drive this afternoon?" Jim asked, looking down at May.

"Oh, Jim, don't ask the bride to go joy-riding!" May said in pretended horror. "Wait a year or so till she's bored to tears with home and husband. Confine your fascinations to an old married vamp like me. . . ."

She broke off, following Gloria's terrified gaze across the room. A few tables away Dick's mother was sitting, in all her glory of black silk and sables! On her broad florid face was a look of disgust as she surveyed them!

Gloria swayed slowly to her feet. Her face was white as she walked across the dining-room to Mother Gregory's table.

She was afraid of this major-domo of a woman. And Mother Gregory knew it.

"Come into the dressing-room with me," she said sharply. "I want to talk to you a minute or two!"

She gripped Gloria above the elbow and steered her out into the woman's rest room. May Seymour winked at Gloria as they passed.

Gloria began to powder her nose before the mirror, to gain a moment's time to gather her wits.

"Sit down!" Mother Gregory said. And Gloria sat.

"Now then," Dick's mother said in her powerful voice, "what in the world are you doing down here with that woman who is the talk of the town? Have you lost your senses?"

"How do you mean, talk of the town?" Gloria asked weakly. Mother Gregory snorted.

"You know as well as I do that her affair with Jim Carewe is common talk everywhere!" she said. "And here I find you sitting with them where everybody can see you!"

"And another thing, young woman . . . I sent Maggie over to your house to show you how to cook and take care of the home Dick's given you . . . not to leave you free to gallivant all over town with your queer friends!"

"If that's what Maggie's there for, you can have her back . . . and I'll get a maid of my own!" Gloria cried.

Her fear of Dick's mother was blotted out by her sudden anger.

"If you think I'm going to be a scrubbing-brush for your precious son, you're barking up the wrong tree. I'm not going to drudge for him or for anybody else!" she cried. Tears of fury were in her voice.

"He can perfectly afford to get me a cook, and I don't mean anything previous! I don't have to work in his house. . . . I can go out and earn my twenty-five dollars any week in the year. And it won't be at dishwashing either. . . ."

She rose and, returning to the dining-room, gathered up her beaded bag and white gloves.

Mother Gregory followed. She laid her jeweled hand on Gloria's arm.

"Sit down a minute, while I pay my check," she said gently, "and we'll leave together. There's no need to make a scene this way, is there?"

Together they walked out of the crowded restaurant.

Gloria had forgotten all about May Seymour.

Outside in the street stood Mother Gregory's coupé.

"Jump in!" she said to Gloria.

The girl hesitated.

"I have a little shopping to do . . ." she said.

"Jump in!" Mother Gregory repeated. "I'll drive you home. It's time you and I had a talk about things in general, and marriage in particular!"

She started the car.

"Now, Gloria," she began. "Just what is your idea of what you owe my son, as his wife?"

"What do I owe Dick?" she repeated in surprise. "Why, I don't owe him anything, do I? He wanted to marry me, and he has me."

"You think that's enough?" Mother Gregory asked. "How about being a real wife to him . . . taking care of him, cooking his meals, darning his socks, reading to him when he's tired? How about such things? Do you try to do them?"

"Certainly not," Gloria snapped. Her beautiful face was distorted with anger.

"Certainly not," she said again. "I can't see where he makes life so terribly comfortable for me. Does he hire a maid for me when I ask him to? Not a chance! . . . Does he leave me the car to use daytimes? No, indeed! He rolls downtown in it himself every morning. And I can walk . . . And what makes me so sore is that I know he can afford to keep a cook and an extra automobile!"

"That's where you're wrong," said Mother Gregory. "Dick is just starting his career. Lawyers don't suddenly make a million like inventors or promoters, you know. Dick has a long, hard row to hoe . . . and you must help him as I helped his father thirty years ago when Dick was just a baby!"

Mother Gregory smiled, her eyes full of memories.

"We had a tiny house then," she said, "and I did every stroke of work in it myself . . . and took care of my baby besides."

Her face became serious.

"By the way, my dear, have your babies early in your married life," she said. "The younger a mother is the more of a playmate she is for her children . . ."

Suddenly Mother Gregory stopped.

In the tilted mirror above the windshield of the car, she could see Gloria's face. It was smiling scornfully.

"I'm scarcely married, and you're beginning to talk babies already," the girl said. "Is that all women are for . . . to have babies?"

"If it isn't that, perhaps you'll tell me what they are for," suggested Dick's mother.

"Oh, how do I know what women are for?" Gloria cried. "But I suppose they're on earth to live and be happy like any one else."

"And to drink hard liquor, to smoke cigarettes until they're dopey, and to play bridge for money until they have faces like misers!" Mother Gregory's voice was deep with disgust. "Oh, you women who are growing up . . . who can't boil a decent pot of coffee, but can shake up any kind of cocktail that's ever been invented! You girls who haven't strength enough to put the buttons in your husband's shirtsleeves, but have 'pep' enough to strut and shimmy half the night at some tough party or other! What earthly good are any of you? . . . Now, Gloria, I want you to think things over. . . ."

"Will you please stop this car and let me out?" Gloria interrupted. "I've stood all the insults I can stand."

Silently Mrs. Gregory stopped the car. Gloria got out, and her mother-in-law drove on.

Gloria turned toward home, kicking the walks as she went.

By the time she reached home she was thoroughly out of temper.

CHAPTER V

DICK's roadster stood in the driveway.

There was a fire burning in the living-room grate. And before it, stretched out on the davenport asleep, lay Dick.

Gloria tiptoed into the room and stood looking down at him. His face was flushed, and he breathed quickly. Suddenly he opened his eyes.

"Gloria," he said. And his voice was like that of a sick child who wants his mother.

"What's happened to you?" Gloria asked.

"Nothing," Dick answered. "I've had a nasty little cold for days, and it seems to have slipped up behind me, all of a sudden. Haven't got any lemons in the house, have we?"

"I guess so." Gloria went out into the kitchen. Maggie was there, tearfully peeling onions.

"Maggie," her mistress said, "have we any lemons? Mr. Gregory wants one for his cold."

"It's a hot lemonade he wants," Maggie said, "as I've been telling him for the last hour. But nothing would he take till yourself came home. I'll make it, and then we'll get him into bed between blankets with a hot water bottle to his feet . . . and let him sweat the cold out of himself by morning."

She moved briskly around the kitchen as she spoke, filling the tea-kettle and mixing lemon juice and sugar together in a tall glass.

Gloria went back to Dick.

"Come upstairs," she said. "Maggie thinks you ought to go to bed. And while you're undressing I'll put a hot water bottle in your bed."

In fifteen minutes Dick was comfortable. Gloria turned to leave the room. She wanted to telephone the employment agency about a maid to take Maggie's place. For she was sure that the first thing Mother Gregory would do would be to send for Maggie to come back to her.

"Don't go," Dick said. "Stay here and talk to me."

"What is there to talk about?" Gloria asked indifferently.

"Lots of things," Dick answered. "What has my golden girl been doing all day?"

"Fighting with your mother, mostly," said Gloria with piercing sweetness. Dick looked miserable.

"And if you want to make a hit with me, you'll never ask me to have anything to do with her again," she went on bitterly. "She's been bawling me out for not doing my own housework. I notice she keeps a maid, all right! And she had the cheek to tell me I ought to go ahead and have a whole family of children . . . when she had only one herself!"

Dick stared at her thoughtfully.

"She had three, you know . . . my mother," he said at last. "The other two died. I am sorry you rowed with her, Gloria."

"That's right, blame it all on me!" Gloria replied. "It was she who started it. I was having lunch with May Seymour and she made me leave the table and go home with her . . . and then started to tell me what a terrible woman I am. So I just got out of her darned old car. And you can do as you please about it, but I'm through with your family!"

Downstairs Maggie was striking the Japanese dinner gong. It chimed like the very voice of peace and harmony.

Gloria ran down to the dining-room to eat alone.

So this was marriage!

Facing an evening alone while Dick dozed upstairs.

Doing her own housework beginning to-morrow? Helping Dick get along, year after year? Losing her looks in the meantime!

. . . Why, she wouldn't be much better off than her own mother!

The only difference would be that she, herself, would have a better house and more money to run it with . . . roast lamb instead of stew, fresh peas instead of canned ones!

Gloria pounded the table in her anger and disappointment. . . . How life had tricked her! . . . Well, she'd get herself out of this mess, somehow!

The next morning Dick was better but too ill to leave the house.

Gloria sat beside him while he ate breakfast before the bedroom fire.

"Dicky-bird," she said with all her sweetness, "I'm going

to hire a maid of our own to-day, dear. I want to get her used to the house before we throw our first party."

"Party?" asked Dick, startled.

"Now don't say we can't afford one, first thing," Gloria cried. "I've figured it all out. It won't cost much for food and cocktails and a little jazz band. Not much over a hundred dollars . . ."

Maggie appeared in the doorway.

"A Miss Briggs downstairs to see you, Mr. Dick," she said.

"Miss Briggs," Gloria repeated. "Who in the world is Miss Briggs?"

"Miss Briggs is my secretary," Dick answered.

"Please ask her to come upstairs, Maggie," he went on. "I told her yesterday when I left that if I wasn't able to come to the office to-day, she'd have to bring my mail out here this morning. Is there any kind of table around that she could use for her typewriter?"

"I suppose she'll have to use my spinet desk. I hope she won't scratch it," Gloria said.

She was taking the ornaments and blotter from it when Miss Briggs knocked on the door.

She was a small, plain woman of thirty or so. Her one good point was her eyes, Gloria saw at a glance. They were black-lashed blue ones, tired and shadowy.

"How do you do, Mrs. Gregory," she smiled when Dick introduced her to Gloria.

"What a marvelous voice!" the girl thought. Miss Briggs' voice was low and silver-sweet as a flute. She began to unpack her typewriter.

Gloria had never thought of any other woman being in Dick's life.

And yet, this Miss Briggs saw more of Dick than she herself saw of him.

She was all alone with him eight or nine hours every day, in his office.

. . . And Gloria could tell, from the way she had looked at him when she came into the room, that her whole life was bound up in Dick. She wondered if Dick knew it. Probably not . . .

Probably Dick didn't want to know it. Men were not interested in plain little women of thirty. . . . What they wanted was the Gloria kind of girl . . . the ones with scented, bur-

nished hair, skin like satin, and little useless, pink-tipped hands. Exquisite toys of women. . . . And she was going to go on being that kind. . . .

With sudden determination Gloria went to the telephone and called an employment agency.

"Pardon me, ma'am."

It was the voice of Maggie behind her. Gloria wheeled sharply.

"Pardon me, but if that's the Finnish employment agency you're calling, there's no need for it," Maggie went on. "Mr. Dick's mother phoned me first thing this morning and told me I was to stay on here as long as you needed me . . . particularly as Mr. Dick was sick."

"Is that so?" Gloria dropped the receiver in her surprise. Then she put it back on its hook and walked into the living-room. She was thinking hard.

"Please come here, Maggie," she called in a few minutes.

"What would it cost to get up a midnight supper for about thirty people?" she asked when Maggie stood before her. "Chicken salad, sandwiches, French pastry and coffee. And how much help would you need to serve such a supper?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want to be bothered having any hired help around," Maggie said with fine scorn. "Let's see, if I make the pastry myself, I think we could do it for about thirty dollars."

"Well, I'm thinking of having a little party next Friday night," Gloria told her. "So go ahead and make your plans."

She spent the rest of the morning at the telephone. She ordered six dozen pink roses, and as many daffodils. She called up May Seymour to ask her the name of the jazz orchestra she had had at her New Year party last year.

"What do you think you're tearing off—a regular party?" May asked slangily. "Well, you want to remember one thing when you're getting your crowd together. . . . Any party is absolute zero in entertainment to me unless Jim Carewe is there. Get me, dearie?"

"I do," Gloria answered. "I'll call him right up and invite him."

She did.

She wondered whether she ought to ask Lola and Bill Hough. Bill was a good mixer and heaps of fun, of course.

But Lola was such a frump. She wasn't pretty any more.

. . . She wouldn't take a cocktail. . . . Besides, she watched Bill like a cat for fear he might happen to have a little fun. And she would telephone her house two or three times during the evening to see if the children were all right . . . and bore everybody to death telling what cute things they said and did!

No. Gloria made up her mind not to ask the Houghs to her party.

As she started up the stairs to Dick's room, Gloria heard Miss Briggs coming down.

"Work all done?" Gloria asked gayly. She was happy now that she knew she was going to have her party. Every one had accepted . . . even to the Gails, the most high-brow of Dick's high-brow friends. The Gails went to Europe every year or two, and Myra Gail spoke of the Avenue de l'Opera as if it were Main Street.

Gloria went to the door to say good-by to Miss Briggs. As she watched her go down the street, she remembered the day she had watched Stanley Wayburn walk swiftly away.

She laughed. . . . She would ask Stan to her party!

She telephoned his hotel.

"This is Gloria Gregory," she said softly when she heard his voice at the other end of the wire. "I'm having a few friends in Friday night, and I want you to come. Will you?"

There was silence for a long minute.

"You know I couldn't get there until after the show . . ." Stan's voice replied.

"I'll expect you about half-past eleven, then. Don't forget," Gloria said.

She thrilled with excitement as she ran upstairs to Dick.

"Hurrah!" she cried, opening the door of their room. "Everybody can come! And I've got everything ordered for Friday night, even the jazz band! Oh, it's going to be a knock-out of a party . . ."

"Do you mean to say you've gone ahead and asked people here for a party Friday night!" Dick exclaimed. "Why, you don't even know that I won't be in bed with pneumonia by then. I'm as sick as a dog, now. Ask Maggie to make me some more hot lemonade, will you? I'm going to take a hot bath and go back to bed."

Dick was much better Friday night.

"I want you to go down in the kitchen as soon as you're

dressed and mix the punch, darling," Gloria lilted. "The pineapple juice and all the rest of the things for it are ready in big crocks in the pantry. And the washtub is on the floor in the corner. . . ."

"What do you mean, washtub?" Dick asked, battling with his shirt studs.

"That's what we're going to make the punch in," his wife laughed. "This isn't going to be a Sunday school festival, sweetie peach. It's going to be a real live party with a kick in it! And I want the punch to be one-third fruit juice and two-thirds gin. Now remember!"

Dick didn't say a word. His wife had just come into his range of vision.

He had never seen any one so beautiful in all his life. He was sure no one else ever had either!

Gloria was all in white that floated around her as she walked across the bedroom. There were strands of pearls around her neck, and bracelets of them on her arms.

"You look like a snow queen," Dick told her. "Remember the Snow Queen in Andersen's fairy tales?"

"Well, then, don't touch me!" Gloria put up one rosy palm as he came toward her. "I'm made of ice and I'll freeze you to death. . . ."

But Dick had her in his arms.

"Oh, Dick, leave me alone!" she cried, wrenching herself away. "Look there! You've just ruined my hair. . . ."

Frowning, she sat down before the dressing-table and began to smooth her soft shining curls.

"Gloria," Dick said suddenly. "Don't you think we're making too much punch for this crowd? They're likely to get sick, dancing in this warm house if they drink too much. . . ."

"Oh, no, they won't," Gloria answered serenely. "They're all used to it. . . . all except Lola Hough. Come on, let's go downstairs. I'll get out the cigarettes while you mix the punch."

She had finally asked Lola and Bill Hough. Dick had insisted upon it. He liked the Houghs, and didn't want to hurt their feelings by leaving them out, he said.

CHAPTER VI

It was almost midnight.

In the sunroom the little jazz band had just swung into the soft melody of "I Want to Be Happy."

"Oh, don't play that thing! Play 'A Couple of Cups of Tea for Two,'" called Bill Hough. He and Gloria were dancing together.

Gloria left him and went over to the leader.

"Will you please play 'Tea for Two' again?" she asked him. He had played "Tea for Two" a dozen times before that evening. Bill Hough had insisted upon it.

"Come on, Gloria!" Bill called now across the hubbub of the room. "Come on! Strut your stuff!"

Gloria returned to him. They began to dance.

She wished Bill Hough weren't so loud. She could see the cold, gray eyes of Myra Gail fixed on him with a sort of disgust as he danced madly around the room.

She wanted to make a good impression upon Myra Gail. She wanted to be friends with her.

Because, if she could make Dick pay for it, she intended to go to Europe next summer with Myra.

Through the smoky haze of the living-room she suddenly saw Stan Wayburn standing in the doorway. She had not seen him come in . . .

She started toward him. Then she felt a hand on her arm. Dick!

"There's your interior decorator man," he said. "How in the world did you happen to invite him to-night?"

For a second Gloria thought she was going to faint.

The bright room whirled around her. She caught hold of a lapel of Dick's coat to steady herself. . . . She tried to smile.

"What did you say, dear?" she gasped. "There's such a racket in the room that I can scarcely hear your voice."

Dick did not return her smile. His face was stern.

"I said," he repeated slowly, "I said that the man I saw leaving this house the other afternoon is standing over there by the door. . . . How did you ever happen to ask him here to-night . . . a man who had sold us a few lamp shades? Or is he a friend of yours?"

Every word Dick said fell on Gloria's heart like a hammer blow.

. . . Still she could find no answer.

She had no idea that Dick had seen Wayburn's face when he had met him leaving the house the other day!

. . . How could she ever explain to Dick that she had lied to him when she had said that Wayburn was a decorator calling about the lamp shades?

. . . How could she tell him the truth? That Wayburn really was an actor, who had had no business to be in Dick's house that day making love to Dick's wife!

Well, she just couldn't! And that was all there was to it!

No. The only way out was to bluff it through! . . . To tell another lie to cover the first one! . . . And that ought to be easy enough.

So Gloria threw back her shining head and laughed.

"You're seeing things, Dicky!" she cried. "You're lit. . . . That isn't my lamp-shade man or anybody like him! That's Stanley Wayburn, who played here in stock all last winter. Don't you remember him? . . . You're cuckoo! Just plain cuckoo! . . . I'll have to cut off your drinks to-night, I can see that!"

She left him. Dizzily she threaded her way through the dancers to Wayburn's side.

The air in the hot rooms was heavy with the smell of perfume and alcohol. It made her giddy.

"How nice of you to come!" Gloria smiled up at Wayburn. He took her hand. The hard pressure of his palm thrilled her, somehow. . . . She felt as if he had taken her in his arms.

The pearls on Gloria's breast stirred as she sighed deeply.

"Come along," she said. "I want you to meet my husband."

Together they went back to Dick's corner. He was in a brown study.

"Dick," Gloria said, "I want you to know an old friend of mine, Stanley Wayburn. You've heard of him, of course.

... Some day Stan is going to back the Barrymore brothers right off the boards! ... Come out into the dining-room, Stan, and I'll give you a drink while nobody's looking."

Dick watched them as they went.

Gloria could feel his angry eyes upon her.

There was a sick, shaky feeling at the pit of her stomach.

She was terribly afraid that Dick knew now that she had lied. ...

She was sure that he suspected that Wayburn and the "lamp-shade man" were one and the same person!

Suddenly something she had heard her grandmother say long ago flashed into her mind. ... "You can lock up from a thief, but you can't lock up from a liar!"

On one end of the long table in the dining-room was a huge punch bowl filled with iced fruit-juice and gin.

Gloria filled two glasses with the bitter-sweet stuff.

"I call this my Indian Guide cocktail because it'll lead you astray, Stan!" she cried recklessly. And drained her glass.

Then Gloria went on in a low tone.

"Whatever you do, don't pay any attention to me, to-night!" she said.

Stan raised his eyebrows. "Why not?" he asked.

"Because I have the most jealous husband in the world," Gloria answered. "And he saw you leaving the house the other day ... or thinks he did. Here comes Myra Gail! Give her a thrill ... she's not having a very gay time."

Mrs. Gail trailed into the room. Behind one hand she hid a tiny yawn.

"Myra, dear," Gloria said loudly, "here's a nice little boy friend for you! Mr. Wayburn's just been telling me that he's dying to meet you. ..."

She was filling three more cocktail glasses as she spoke. She emptied her own, and left Wayburn with Myra.

Gloria's head was going around and around. There was a singing in her ears. She knew she had had too much to drink. Much too much!

Gloria started up the stairs. She wanted just one thing in the world ... to lie down on her own bed and go to sleep!

But the stairs seemed to be made of rubber. She couldn't stand on them.

Suddenly a plate of sandwiches appeared before her.

"Here, eat a blotter!" came Bill Hough's voice. "It'll soak up some of the gin you've been drinking. . . . Better sober up, old girl, before Dick sees you!"

But Gloria pushed Bill and his sandwiches away.

She swayed into the living-room. The jazz band was playing "Oh, Peter!" But nobody was dancing.

On the davenport May Seymour and Jim Carewe were sitting close together, blowing smoke rings at the ceiling.

Gloria crossed the room to them.

"Why don't you get up and dance?" she asked. "Band's playing 'Oh, Peter!' Mos' wonderful music in the world. . . ."

May Seymour took one look at Gloria's white face and starry eyes.

"Sit down here!" she ordered. "Gloria, you've had too much to drink. Make her sit down, Jim!"

But Gloria drifted away. The room seemed to be filled with golden fog. . . . She was very warm and dizzy. She reeled a little.

"I may have had too much to drink, but I'm still going good!" she said to the world at large.

"You certainly are!" It was Dick's voice. He and Lola Hough seemed to swim before her eyes.

"Here, take her out into the kitchen, Lola," Gloria heard Dick say, "and tell Maggie to give her some strong black coffee. See if you can sober her up. . . . If Myra Gail and the rest of the women see her like this they'll tell it all over town to-morrow!"

The next thing Gloria knew she was sitting in her own white kitchen. She didn't know how she had got there.

Through the golden fog she could see Maggie cutting sandwiches.

"I'd always heard that women smoked and drank," Gloria heard Maggie say to Mrs. Hough, "but I never expected to see it! . . . Not in Mr. Dick's house, anyway!"

She cut bread viciously.

"Aw, Maggie, what's a little drink among friends?" Gloria asked cheerfully. She was feeling very happy. The dizzy feeling had left her.

"It's not so much the drink itself . . . It's the way drink makes folks act . . . especially women folks!" snorted Maggie. "Look at yourself, right this minute, Mrs. Gregory, ma'am! . . . and that Mrs. Gail in the dining-room! Her

that's so cold, butter wouldn't melt in her mouth! . . . Well, go and take a look at her now, if you think she's so prim."

Gloria rose to her feet, but Lola caught her by one bare arm.

"No, no, dear!" she pleaded. "Don't go now. Wait until you've had your coffee . . ."

But Gloria had torn herself away.

Uncertainly she pushed open the door between the pantry and the dining-room.

Some one had turned out the lights. The dining-room was in half darkness.

And standing in the breakfast alcove were Myra Gail and Stan Wayburn, locked in one another's arms!

Gloria gave a little moan. She put out one hand and turned on the wall lights.

Instantly the pair in the alcove sprang apart. Gloria laughed bitterly.

"Well, Stan, you certainly are a fast worker!" she said. "You'll pardon me for spoiling your clubby little party, won't you? . . . You see, I'm afraid to go 'round in the dark."

Gloria walked shakily to the buffet. She drank another cocktail.

She wanted to cry. But instead she turned out the lights again and walked out of the room.

She'd show Stanley Wayburn that she wasn't jealous!

She'd show him that it meant nothing to her how many times he might kiss Myra Gail . . . or any other woman!

. . . What was he in her life, anyway?

Nothing but a third-rate actor who happened to look like Valentino!

. . . And yet, somehow, the sight of him kissing Myra Gail had spoiled Gloria's whole evening. . . .

Some one laid a hand on her bare arm. Gloria turned.

Stan!

"Look here, Russet!" he said, "what are you so sore about? You told me to give your sad-eyed friend a thrill, and I did my best to give her one."

"I'll say you did!" Gloria answered. "And anyway I'm not sore about it. I dare say you've kissed hundreds of women. . . . Why should I worry about your kissing Myra Gail?"

She went back into the kitchen.

"I'll have that coffee now, please," she said to Maggie, "and

then let's serve supper. I'm sick and tired of this party, anyway!"

She drank her coffee. May and Jim came in. Jim was carrying two cocktail glasses.

May drank the contents of both, daintily.

"I drink to Married Life!" she cried. "Scrappy days!"

May was a kitchen drinker. Dr. John, her husband, had forbidden her to drink. So May had to have her cocktails when he was out of sight.

"I wish to goodness some kind patient would send in a hurry call for my hubby," May said now. "It cramps my style terribly to have him around at parties. . . . He's so afraid I might happen to have a good time! Go, hunt him up, Gloria, and dance with him, while I have my little drink in peace!"

Gloria went. She found Dr. John and Lola Hough sitting on the stairs talking about Lola's babies.

"You haven't danced with me all evening, Dr. Johnny," Gloria pouted.

Instantly the doctor was on his feet. He put his arms around Gloria, but she slipped out of them.

She crumpled up in a heap on the floor!

Gloria lay there without moving. . . .

But she seemed to be going around and around . . . and around. There was a sound like rushing wind in her ears.

Above it she heard Myra Gail's high voice.

"Our hostess seems to have passed out of the picture," she was saying. "I thought she was drinking more than she could stand!"

Then Gloria felt Dick's arms around her.

Without opening her eyes she knew they were Dick's arms. Strong as steel. . . .

"She'll be all right in a minute . . . she was a bit dizzy," Gloria heard Dr. John's kind voice. "I tell you, Dick, these girls shouldn't drink! They can't get away with it. Nobody can!"

Dick made no answer. He picked his wife up in his arms. . . . "Good-night, Sappho!" the girl heard Bill Hough call in his clownish way. And she knew that Dick was carrying her upstairs.

She felt him tugging at the snaps on her dress . . . pulling off her silver slippers and stockings.

And then, at last, she was in bed.

Oh, the cool, delicious feeling of the pillows . . . the comfort of the quiet room!

Gloria half opened her eyes.

Dick was hanging her clothes neatly over the back of a chair. . . . He really was a dear, after all.

She tried to tell him so. But she was too tired. . . . If only the sick feeling in her stomach would go away! Ugh!

What a ghastly party!

And what a fool she had made of herself!

If only she hadn't asked Stan Wayburn to come!

For Gloria knew that if she hadn't been so upset about Wayburn and Myra, she would never have taken those last two cocktails, and then fainted!

. . . That was the effect Wayburn had always had upon her . . . to make her do wild, reckless things that she didn't want to do! Things that she was ashamed of afterward!

Dick was worth ten Stanley Wayburns. . . . And yet Dick couldn't make her glow and tremble by simply clasping her hand, as Stan could!

. . . And Gloria wondered if she would care if she came upon Dick kissing another woman.

She supposed she would. . . . She wasn't sure. But then Dick wouldn't do such a thing!

There floated up to her sounds of the merrymaking downstairs.

The jazz band was playing "Tea for Two" again.

Some one was singing it in a husky tenor . . . Stan Wayburn's voice!

"Nobody near us,

"To see us, or hear us. . . ."

Gloria clenched her little hands. The nails bit into her palms.

. . . In her mind's eye she could see Myra Gail watching Stan with her long gray eyes. And Stan, no doubt, was singing the lovesick words straight at her!

. . . Well, Gloria made up her mind, she'd soon put a stop to that!

"Dick!" she called sharply. Her mind was almost clear again.

"Well," he answered. He was standing looking out of the window.

"Don't you think you ought to go down to our guests?" Gloria asked. "Tell Maggie to serve supper right away. Then they'll go home. I'm so tired of the noise I could die! . . . Get rid of them all, please!"

Dick came over to her. He sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Gloria," he said harshly, "I'm going to ask you a question. And I want the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! Get me?"

Gloria nodded. She held her breath.

"This fellow Wayburn. . . . How long have you known him?"

"Oh, a couple of years. I used to have a sort of kid's crush on him," Gloria answered.

"And you still have?" Dick asked. "You still have a crush on him?"

Gloria closed her eyes.

"I wouldn't answer your foolish question!" she said. "Look here, Dick Gregory, what do you think you're doing . . . giving me the third degree?"

Dick set his square jaw. Suddenly he seized Gloria in those flexible steel hands of his. He shook her.

"Answer me!" he said. "You are in love with him, aren't you?"

Gloria gave a little scream.

"Oh, you're hurting me!" she cried.

Dick loosened his hold. There were white marks on the pale-rose flesh of her arm where his fingers had pressed.

Instantly he was all tenderness.

"Darling, I did hurt you! I'm sorry," he said.

Gloria leaned back on the pillows and closed her burning eyes. Dick stroked her hair back from her damp forehead.

. . . How like a child she was, he thought, with her love of fun and pretty clothes!

He looked at the dress Gloria had worn that night, as it lay across the back of a chair. He wondered what staggering sum she had paid for it. . . . Well, when the bill came in he would pay it cheerfully, no matter what it was!

For, after all, she was his only reason for working and

making money. Without her . . . well, Dick couldn't picture life without Gloria!

There was a knock on the door. Then Maggie's troubled voice.

"Mr. Dick," she called. "Shall I serve supper or not? The company seems to be leaving. Something's happened. You'd better come downstairs!"

Gloria opened her eyes.

"There, you see!" she cried. "I told you to go downstairs and get that wild crowd out of the house before the whole party went blooey! . . . What's happened, Maggie?"

But Maggie had followed Dick downstairs.

Gloria crept out of bed. Her head swam. But she went out into the hall to listen.

Below there was a babble of voices. The front door slammed.

Then she heard some one running up the stairs toward her. . . . It was Lola Hough. She was crying.

"What in the world is the matter down there? What's happened?" Gloria whispered. She drew Lola into her bedroom and closed the door.

She was much more interested in the outcome of her party than in Lola's tears just now.

"Oh, it was just me and my crazy jealousy!" Lola sobbed. She had sunk down upon the floor beside Gloria's dressing-table. "You know . . . you know Bill's always been wild about May Seymour! And she doesn't give a snap of her fingers about him! . . . Well, he was trying to kiss her behind the curtains in your sunroom, and I saw him. . . . And I guess I lost my head. . . ." Her voice ended in a burst of sobbing.

"What did you do when you lost your head?" Gloria asked coldly.

She had no sympathy for this shabby woman who did not know how to hold her husband. . . . It was her own fault if he made love to women who had sense enough to take care of their looks . . . to keep their "pep" and style!

"Oh, I bawled him out in front of everybody," Lola replied dismally. "I bawled the whole crowd out! . . . I 'said my soul' about these drinking parties! . . . Somebody's husband and somebody else's wife making love in dark corners! Everybody getting pie-eyed and spoony!"

Lola stopped to wipe her eyes. Then she went on.

"What fun married people get out of petting parties like these I fail to see!" she cried. "To me they're horrors!"

Gloria drew in her breath. When she spoke her voice tinkled like ice in a glass.

"Well, Lola," she said, sarcastically, "I'm glad you enjoyed my party!"

Lola stood up and began to brush her hair before the mirror.

"Oh, I know I've made you angry, Gloria," she said. "But I've reached the point where I don't care what people think of me! . . . Bill's just driving me crazy. He's never at home! He hardly ever gives me a cent for the house! I'm up to my eyes in debt. . . . And then when we go out any place where May Seymour is, he drinks and makes a fool of himself over her. . . ."

"And what does May do? She snaps her fingers at him!" Gloria broke in. "And that's why he's in love with her . . . because she doesn't care whether he lives or dies! . . . Oh, can't you see, Lola, that the way to make Bill love you is to treat him like a doormat?"

. . . Lola looked at her, wide-eyed.

"How could I ever treat Bill like a doormat? Why, I love Bill!" she cried. "He's all I love in the world . . . besides the babies!"

"Yes, the babies! Always the babies!" Gloria mimicked her. "The babies are all you think about! . . . Your whole house is run for the babies! No man wants his home to be a day nursery!"

"What does he want it to be, then?" Lola asked.

"A jazz palace!" Gloria told her. "You show your husband a good time at home . . . and he won't wander all over town looking for it somewhere else! Show a little pep, Lola! . . . Go out and buy yourself a face massage and some new clothes . . . and make Bill foot the bills!"

But Lola shook her head.

"You don't know Bill," she said. "He never pays for anything!"

Gloria looked at her.

Lola's hair was faded. Her mouth drooped. Her sallow skin was innocent of powder. . . . And she had worn that same blue foulard dress to every party for the last two years!

She was beaten . . . whipped. Life had passed her by.

Well, that was what Life did to you if you let it!

That was what a husband did, if you let him get away with it!

. . . And just let Dick try to keep from her . . . from Gloria Gordon Gregory . . . the things that were coming to her! The attention! The clothes! The good times!

She'd be no Lola Hough to sit by and cry! Not this year . . . or any other!

CHAPTER VII

THE door opened. Dick came in.

"Well, everybody's gone," he said. Then he turned to Lola.

"Bill's waiting to drive you home. I'll take you downstairs." Dick's voice dropped to a whisper. "Don't say a word to him. He's sore as a pup!"

Gloria listened to Lola and Dick go downstairs together.

Then, in a little while, she heard Bill's voice calling to her from the lower hall.

"Nighty-night, Gloria!" he bawled at the top of his lungs. "Sorry Lola crabbed your party!"

Gloria laughed.

"She didn't crab it . . . everybody ought to have a hot time at a housewarming, anyway!" she called. "Good night, old timer! . . . Good night, Lola!"

. . . Then she heard the sound of Bill's wheezy old car backing out of the driveway. "Asthma," Bill called his car.

What a nice old thing Bill was in spite of his drinking and his card-playing!

After all, it was probably Lola's fault that he acted the way he did!

. . . A pretty woman who knew how to "vamp" a man could make him do anything under the sun that she wanted him to do! . . . But Lola had lost all interest in "vamping" Bill or looking pretty for him . . . So of course she had lost him!

No man wanted to sit around a house alone while his wife spent every minute bathing and feeding and rocking three children, either!

. . . What a poor simp Lola was!

Half asleep, Gloria went on thinking. . . .

Stan Wayburn's good-looking face floated into her mind. She wondered if Stan had kissed Myra Gail to give her a "thrill" . . . or because he had wanted to kiss her . . .

Myra wasn't so awfully alluring. But she had a way with her, at that! And she knew a lot about books and plays and things. . . .

Gloria fell asleep.

She was awakened by Dick's voice.

"Gloria! Wake up!" he was saying. "Maggie's having a brainstorm down in the kitchen. . . . Says she's going back to Mother's house to-night. Have you said anything to hurt her feelings? . . . If you have, for the love of Mike, go down and beg her pardon. . . . Gloria! Gloria!"

He shook her again. But Gloria was fairly drugged with sleep and alcohol.

Dick shook her again. She opened her topaz eyes.

"What in the world are you screeching about? Leave me alone!" she said crossly.

Dick lifted her out of bed and set her on the rug in her bare feet.

"Put on your slippers and kimono and run down to Maggie," he said. "She's going home to-night, she says. . . . If you want a maid, you'd better go and stop her!"

Gloria went downstairs.

In the kitchen Maggie was strapping a bulging suitcase. She had put on her hat. Her coat was thrown over a chair.

"Now where do you think you're going in the middle of the night?" Gloria asked.

Maggie glared at her.

"That's my business!" she snapped. "But I can tell you one thing, Mrs. Gregory! . . . I'll not be stopping another night in a house like this! Women drinking and smoking and carrying on right in front of my eyes. . . . Look at yourself! Hardly able to stand!"

It was true that Gloria could hardly stand. She was still faint and dizzy. She leaned against the cold stove.

"I've always worked for decent people . . . and been decent, myself!" Maggie went on. "I've kept myself to myself for forty-five years, and no cheap actor is going to chuck me under the chin, my lady! Let me tell you that!"

"Who chucked you under the chin?" Gloria asked sweetly.

"Oh, that actor . . . that Mr. Smart Aleck, the one you call 'Stan,'" Maggie answered. She tossed her head.

"Oh, Maggie, it must have been accidental! I'm sure he didn't mean to do it!" Gloria said. She laughed in spite of

herself. The thought of Stan Wayburn chucking the elderly Maggie under her fat chin was too funny!

"Well, anyway, I'm going . . . and I'm going to-night!" Maggie declared.

She began to put on her coat.

"Oh, Maggie, you wouldn't leave me to clean up this mess of a house all alone, would you?" Gloria was on the verge of tears.

The kitchen table was filled with sticky glasses. The sink was piled high with plates waiting to be washed. Some salad dressing was splashed against the wall. . . .

And Gloria knew that the rest of the house was littered with cigarette ashes and stubs, with wilted flower petals, and all the rest of the sordid souvenirs of a "wild" party.

"I'm sure it's not my fault that the house is a mess! It was as neat as a new pin this afternoon . . . and should be, now," Maggie said in her most dignified manner. "Mr. Dick's mother gives dinner parties, but her house never looks like this when they're over, let me tell you! . . . She knows how to entertain!"

Maggie picked up her coat, hat and traveling bag just as Dick came into the kitchen.

"Wait a minute, Maggie," he said, quietly attempting to take the bag from her hand.

"No, Mr. Dick," replied Maggie, trying to pull away from him. "I am going. I will not stay in this house another night."

"If you've really made up your mind to go back to Mother's house I'll drive you over," Dick said. "You can't go walking around the town at this hour of night alone."

He started to go back into the hall for his hat and coat.

But Gloria barred his way. She threw her arms across the door.

"Dick Gregory, you must be crazy!" she said. "Here's this woman leaving me at a moment's notice—and you actually upholding her in what she's doing to me!"

Dick stooped and kissed his angry little wife. Then he gently pushed her out of his way.

"Run upstairs, Littlest!" he said quietly. "Don't be afraid here by yourself. . . . I'll be back in ten minutes."

Cold with anger, Gloria climbed the stairs through the silent house.

She heard the hum of Dick's roadster as it swung down the street.

The clock in the hall downstairs began to chime . . . one, two, three, four!

Four o'clock! In another four hours Dick would be wanting his breakfast. And no Maggie here to get it for him!

. . . Well, let him go without breakfast! It would serve him right!

He had been so ready to take Maggie back to his mother's house . . . let him see how he liked getting along without her!

For Gloria had made up her mind she would not get breakfast.

She would not sweep and dust.

She certainly would not wash greasy dishes. . . .

In a word, she would not work!

"If I ever start drudging around the house, I'll have my mother's life all over again. . . . And I'd rather be dead!" she told herself.

She looked at her pink-tipped hands with their shiny nails. Then she thought of her mother's. How rough and calloused they were! . . . No, she would never have hands like Mother's . . . never!

She climbed into her soft bed that smelled of lavender flowers. Maggie had made lavender bags for the linen closet. . . .

Gloria turned on the reading lamp. Then from a drawer in her bedside table she took several small bottles and jars.

She dipped a wad of cotton into almond oil, and wiped all the powder from her skin with it. With another wad she patted her face lightly with witch hazel.

Then she rubbed muscle oil under her eyes and around her mouth . . . the places where lines first begin to show themselves. Her skin was as soft as a fresh-laundered baby's.

After that she turned out her light. And slept like a baby. When Dick returned every light in the house was blazing.

He went around from room to room snapping them out.

The house reeked with the smell of stale tobacco smoke and gin.

Dick threw open a window in the sunroom and let in the clean, cold night air.

Then he went upstairs. . . .

He stood for a long time looking down at his sleeping wife.

Her dark lashes lay in a shadow on her cheeks. Her mouth was like a scarlet flower against that warm white skin of hers.

She looked as pure as some old Italian master's picture of an angel!

. . . How had she happened to ask that fellow Wayburn to the housewarming Dick wondered for the hundredth time.

. . . How well did she know him?

. . . And was it really Wayburn whom Dick had seen leaving his house a few days ago? . . . Or had Gloria told the truth when she said that the man was an interior decorator?

These questions went 'round and 'round in Dick's tired brain like squirrels in a cage. . . .

He made up his mind to ask Gloria about Wayburn again in the morning. And this time he would not let her put him off!

No matter what the truth was, he would have it, by Jove!

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Gloria awoke in the morning the room was full of sunshine.

She stretched luxuriously, like a cat.

Then she got up on one elbow and looked around her.

Dick's bed was empty. The covers were flung over the foot of it to let it air.

She supposed Dick had left for the office without waking her to say good-by. . . . He knew how she loved to sleep until noon.

She wondered where he had had his breakfast. . . .

The thought of breakfast made Gloria realize how very hungry she was.

She got out of bed. She would bathe and go downtown to eat. And then she would go to the employment agency to hire a maid. . . . The mere thought of the disorder downstairs sickened Gloria.

What a horrible job housework was . . . eternally making dirty things clean! Dirty dishes, dirty clothes, dirty floors and walls. . . .

While her bath was filling Gloria did her exercising.

She touched the floor a hundred times with her finger tips.

She got down on the rug to do her "bicycle" exercises.

She stood up and went through the head movements that keep the face young. . . . Her head ached terribly, but she did not falter.

This was the way to remain beautiful! To start young, and to work constantly to keep your lines and color!

For if you lost them you were through! Absolutely! . . . Men had no use for women unless they were pretty. . . . What fools women were not to realize that!

Suddenly Gloria stopped exercising. She sniffed the air with her delicate nostrils.

There was a smell of fresh coffee in the house . . . a delicious, appetizing smell!

Then Gloria heard footsteps on the stairs.

Had Maggie changed her mind and come back to work?

. . . The door opened. In walked Dick, carrying a steaming tray!

"You didn't know I was a regular cook, did you?" Dick grinned.

"I certainly did not!" Gloria laughed. "But isn't it nice for me that I married one. . . . Let's see what you've got ready for me, chef!"

Dick set the tray down on the bedside table. On it was a plate of sugary rolls that Maggie had made the day before, a silver dish filled with butter balls, and the steaming coffee.

"I made the coffee," Dick said, "and believe me, it's some brew . . . strong enough to float an egg!"

"Where did you ever learn to make coffee?" Gloria idly asked. As a matter of fact, she didn't care where Dick had learned. The great thing was that he had made it!

"On camping trips when I was a kid," answered Dick. He put his arm around his wife and drew her down into his lap.

"I can broil bacon and fish and fry potatoes, too," he said proudly. "Honestly, Gloria, cooking isn't hard work. . . . I wish you'd try it. I'd love to see you in a white apron fussing around the kitchen. . . ."

Instantly Gloria's good humor vanished.

"Oh, I don't doubt that you would!" she cried. "You'd love to see me flying around with a mop and a scrubbing-brush, too! You'd be crazy about seeing me with my nails broken and my hair flying and my face haggard like Lola Hough's, wouldn't you? . . . Well, you never will, Mr. Man! Because I'll never be a slave for you or anybody else! . . . And a new maid comes into this house to-day or I walk out of it! See?"

She jumped up from Dick's knees. She threw herself face-downward on her bed, and burst into angry tears.

"Now don't start that hysterical stuff!" Dick pleaded. There was fear in his voice . . . a man's fear of a woman's tears.

"I didn't say you couldn't have a housemaid, sweetkins," he went on gently. "If it takes every cent I have you shall have one . . . but I guess every man dreams of seeing his wife doing little jobs around the home he's made for her. . . . What's marriage, anyway, but the joy of a man and a woman building a nest for the children they hope to have?"

Gloria sat up suddenly and put her arms around Dick's neck.

She leaned back and let her brilliant eyes rest in his.

"Is that what marriage means to you, Rikky-Tikky-Tavy?" she asked. "Doesn't it mean me? . . . Doesn't it mean love and thrills, too, to you . . . just a little bit?"

She took his head between her hands and kissed him on his forehead. Dick held her close.

"You know you're the only thing to me," he said solemnly. "You know you hold my whole life in the palm of one of your hands. . . . And it's because I do love you that I want this house to be a home for both of us . . . and after a while, for our babies."

. . . Gloria said nothing at all.

The telephone rang.

Gloria jumped up to answer it.

"Yes?" she said.

Stanley Wayburn's voice came to her over the wire!

"Well . . . how's my Russet this morning?" he said.

"Very well," Gloria answered stiffly. She knew that Dick was listening.

"Have you forgiven me for playing around with your friend, Myra?" Stan asked. "Or are you still green-eyed about it?"

Gloria knew that she couldn't answer that question with Dick right there in the room. And she could feel an uncomfortable flush spreading itself over her face and neck. . . . At that moment she wished Stanley Wayburn on the other side of the world!

"When am I going to see you again?" Stan's voice asked after a long interval.

Still Gloria made no answer. She actually shook with fright.

Then Stan apparently had a flash of understanding.

". . . What's the matter? Why can't you talk? Hubby still at home?" he asked.

"Yes!" Gloria could answer that.

She heard the click of a receiver in her ear. Wayburn had hung up.

"Who was that on the telephone?" Dick asked carelessly.

He did not look at her. He stood by the chiffonier, lighting a cigarette.

"One . . . of . . . my friends," Gloria stammered.

"Who?"

"Does it matter?" Gloria asked.

"It matters very much . . . to me," Dick said. He came toward her.

"It was Wayburn, wasn't it?" he asked.

Gloria threw back her head defiantly.

"Well, what if it was?" she asked. "What's so terribly wrong about his calling me up to thank me for the good time he had here last night? That's only common politeness . . . for him to do that!"

She poured herself a second cup of Dick's coffee. Then she took a cigarette from the package he had left lying on the tray. She put it daintily between her lips.

"Give me a light, Dick," Gloria said.

He came toward her. But instead of lighting her cigarette he pulled it from her mouth. Violently he threw it into the waste basket.

"How long have you had that rotten habit?" he asked.

"Why, I've always smoked . . . that is, for the last two or three years," Gloria said. "Didn't you know that?"

Dick shook his head. He smiled. But there was a sort of misery in his eyes.

"I guess there are a lot of things about you that I don't know," he said. "For instance, I never knew you had a taste for liquor . . . until last night."

Gloria laughed. Her face was as merry as a small girl's.

"Yes, yes, go on," she begged. "Tell me all the other black traits of character that I've kept hidden from you for so long! . . . When I drink it's a crime. When you drink it's a foolish act! . . . When I smoke it's a disgrace! . . . When you smoke it 'rests your nerves!' . . . But I can't see where it's any worse for women to do those things than for men!"

The more she talked the angrier Gloria became. She stamped her small foot.

"Here you are shut up in an office all day alone with that secretary of yours . . . your Miss Briggs! How do I know that you're not making love to her right along? . . . But if an old friend like Stan Wayburn happens to call me up and talk to me for five minutes, you throw a fit about it!" she stormed. "I tell you I won't be treated this way . . . as if I were a bad child! I'll do just as I please! And it will take more than you to stop me!"

"Whew!" Dick said. "You're quite some little spitfire, Gloria!"

He pulled out his watch.

"It's nearly noon," he said. "I think I'd better be starting for the office. . . . We aren't getting anywhere with this argument, anyway. . . ."

He started for the door. Then he wheeled suddenly and came back into the sunny room. From under her lashes Gloria watched him.

"If I asked you something, would you tell me the truth?" Dick asked.

Gloria pondered.

"I might," she said. She picked up a nail file and began to "point" her beautifully kept nails.

"Well, then," Dick began, "why did you never mention this fellow Wayburn, in all the months before we were married?"

Gloria shrugged her lace-covered shoulders.

"Why should I have mentioned that I knew him?" she asked. "Is he so very important?"

How could she tell Dick the truth about Stan Wayburn?

How could she tell him that there had been a time when she would gladly have married Stan if he had asked her to . . . but that he had not asked her?

. . . How could she tell him that there had been a night a year ago when she had cried for hours because Stan had left town without saying good-by to her?

. . . That there had been weeks and weeks afterward when she had tried not even to think about Stan . . . much less talk about him?

. . . And that even now when she was a married woman, he had only to look into her eyes to make her forget every one else in the world . . . even Dick himself?

. . . How could she tell Dick that? She just couldn't.

. . . And anyway, it was none of his business!

Dick's voice broke in upon her thought.

"You said last night that you'd had a sort of childish love affair with Wayburn," he said. "Did you ever care for him as much as you do for me?"

Gloria drew a long breath.

"No wonder you're a good lawyer, Dick!" she said. "You can think up more questions to ask a person than anybody else in the world, I'll bet! . . . Yes, I did think a lot of Stan

once upon a time . . . but it wasn't in the way I care for you."

She got up and walked over to the window. She did not want Dick to see her face. She felt as if all her thoughts were written on it for him to read.

"Just how much do you care for me?" His voice was bitter.

"You ought to know . . . I married you, didn't I?" Gloria asked.

She turned from the window and sat on the arm of Dick's chair. She laid her cheek on his dark hair. She was just a bit afraid of Dick when he was in a suspicious mood like this. . . .

Then she kissed him. That, she knew, was the surest way to remove all doubt of her from his mind!

"You see, Dick," Gloria went on, "I knew, from the minute I met you, that you were going to be my husband. And in the same way I always knew that Stanley Wayburn and I were never going to be more than playmates. . . . A girl always sizes men up that way!"

"And just how long were you and Wayburn . . . playmates?" Dick asked.

"Oh, for two or three months last winter . . . just before I met you," the girl answered. "Look here, Dick, I don't cross-question you about every girl you ever were in love with before you married me! What are you trying to get at, asking me all these questions?"

Gloria laughed nervously.

Dick turned in his chair and took her in a grip of iron.

"I'll tell you what I'm trying to get at!" he said. "I'm trying to get at the truth about this Wayburn! . . . the man I saw leaving. . . . He was Wayburn, wasn't he? You lied to me when you said he was a decorator from the furniture store, didn't you?"

Gloria struggled in Dick's arms. Her soft and yielding body had become a bundle of steel wire.

"You let me alone!" she panted.

"I won't!" Dick said stubbornly. "I won't, until you've told me whether the fellow you had in this house that day was Wayburn or not!"

"It wasn't Stan Wayburn!" Gloria cried. "And you know

it! Haven't I told you a dozen times that it was the man about the lamp shades?"

Dick freed her.

Gloria saw that he believed her lie.

"I'm sorry," he said slowly. "But I would have sworn it was Wayburn. . . . You'll have to forgive me, Gloria. I'm so damnably jealous of you!"

Gloria tied her head up in a towel. She began to lather her face with cold cream.

"I should say you are jealous!" she agreed. "If you're going to think that every interior decorator or bill collector who comes to this house is Stan Wayburn, we'd better separate right now!"

She walked into the bathroom.

"My bath water's all cold now," Gloria grumbled. "I was ready to take my bath half an hour ago when you started this row! . . . I suppose I'll die of pneumonia if I bathe in this cold stuff. Then maybe you'll be sorry for the cat-and-dog life you've led me!"

She closed the door.

"Hey, give me a kiss before I go!" Dick called. He had put on his hat and picked up his brief-case.

But Gloria had locked the door and turned the water on in the tub. . . . She pretended not to hear him.

As soon as she was dressed Gloria closed the door of her disordered house behind her and started out.

The employment agency was kept by an efficient-looking woman who said she was sure she knew the very housemaid for Gloria.

"Her name is Ranghild Swanson," she said. "I'll call her on the phone and send her right up to your house to see you. I'm sure you'll like her, Mrs. Gregory."

On the way home Gloria passed Lola Hough's shabby, rambling house.

The twins were on the front walk on their kiddie cars. The baby sat in his white buggy on the porch, watching them ride up and down. . . . Lola was probably drudging away in the house, as usual, Gloria thought to herself.

"Where's your mother?" she asked suddenly of Billy, Junior.

"In vee house, makin' cookies!" said Billy, "and when dem

is made, Betty and me is goin' to have one. . . . Go on in, maybe she'll give you one, too!"

On a sudden impulse Gloria ran up the steps. She rang the bell.

"Come out in the kitchen," Lola Hough said when she opened the door. "I'm doing my Saturday baking. . . . Smell the cookies in the oven?"

Gloria followed her through the clean rooms of the house. The carpets were threadbare and the furniture worn. But there were red geraniums blooming in all the windows; and the house, somehow, seemed a happy place.

"I have the time of my life on Saturdays," Lola remarked in her brisk way. "The laundry and mending and cleaning are all out of the way earlier in the week. . . . So Saturday's my day for baking and marketing. . . . Don't you enjoy going to market, Gloria? I do."

She opened the oven door as she spoke. A rich spicy odor filled the sunlit kitchen.

Gloria stared at her. There were pink spots in Lola's face. Her blue eyes were alight. It was plain to be seen that she really was "having the time of her life" . . . baking cookies!

"Do I enjoy going to market?" Gloria repeated slowly. "Are you trying to kid me, Lola? Why, I've never marketed in my life . . . and I never will so long as the grocer has a telephone!"

Lola deftly emptied a panful of crisp, hot cookies onto a tea towel.

"That's because you're new to your job of keeping house," she said. "After awhile, you'll become an artist at planning meals and keeping down expenses. . . ."

Gloria jumped up from her chair. This sort of talk bored her.

"Jiminy, it's three o'clock! I must go," she said. "I have a new maid coming. . . . Maggie quit her job last night after the party."

"Wait until I take these gingerbread boys out of the oven . . . and I'll go to the door with you," Lola said. There was a troubled frown on her face.

"Gloria," she said after a long pause, "I'm terribly sorry for going to pieces last night the way I did. . . . It's not that I mind having said that I think drinking parties are

dreadful. I do think it! . . . But I'm sorry I told you about Bill and his drinking . . . and his debts."

"Oh, I forgot about that as soon as you'd said it," Gloria answered. "Besides, everybody knows all about Bill, anyway."

"I know," Lola answered. "But I'm his wife . . . and no matter what he does, it's my job to stand up for him. And if I do I know that, in the end, everything will come out all right!"

"Lola," said Gloria suddenly, "are you ever sorry you married Bill?"

"Sorry I married Bill?" Lola repeated in a surprised tone. "Of course not! . . . Why, I'd rather be poor and be Bill's wife than . . . anything else on earth!"

Gloria stared at her. She saw that Lola meant what she said. Overworked and neglected, she still was happy in making a home for a man who never was in it when there was any other place to go. She was a puzzle!

CHAPTER IX

As Gloria went up the street toward her own house she noticed a girl all in rusty black just ahead of her.

The girl turned in at the Gregorys' front walk. Gloria hurried to catch up with her.

"You must be the maid from the employment agency . . . Ranghild Swanson?" she asked.

The girl turned and smiled. Gloria liked her instantly. She hated people who weren't pleasant to look at.

This girl with her corn-flower blue eyes and corn-colored hair was.

Together they walked up the steps of the house.

"Tell me what you can do," Gloria said when they were in the hall.

"I can do any kind of housework," Ranghild said simply. "And I'm a good, plain cook. And if you have a washing-machine I don't mind doing the laundry."

Gloria considered. This sounded too good to be true!

"And how much would you want for doing all that work?" she asked.

"Eighteen dollars a week." Ranghild's voice was firm.

Eighteen dollars! Seventy-five a month! Gloria wondered if Dick could afford to pay Ranghild that much money. . . . Oh, well, he'd just have to pay it!

. . . Other men could afford maids for their wives. There was no reason why Dick couldn't, too!

"All right," Gloria said. "Can you start work to-morrow?"

Ranghild nodded. She said she'd be at the house in time to get breakfast. . . . That was a blessing!

But in the meantime there was the house to be cleaned up.

As soon as Ranghild had gone Gloria took off her hat and fur coat.

She hung them in the clothes-closet under the stairs. In the corner of it stood the vacuum cleaner.

Gloria took it out. She attached it to a floor plug and ran it around the house.

Then she laid a newspaper on the floor. Into it she threw all the broken glasses and cigarette ashes she could find.

Some one had emptied a glass of gin-ger ale all over the Spanish shawl on the piano. The silk had stuck to the wood.

And when Gloria tried to pull it away, a large piece of the gaudy embroidery was torn out. Underneath, the wood was stained and marked.

. . . There was a big hole burned in the blue velvet davenport. Bill Hough had probably done that with his everlasting cigarette!

The inlaid wood of the dining-room table was covered with white rings where sticky, wet glasses had been set down.

A curtain had been pulled from its pole. It lay on the floor.

The whole house was a wreck!

"Next time I give a party it'll be a barn-dance or a picnic in the woods!" Gloria said to herself. "They certainly ruined my cute little house last night!"

She forgot her own part in the revelry.

The front doorbell rang. . . .

Mother Gregory!

Gloria could see her through the net curtains on the door.

She made up her mind not to let her in.

Then the bell rang again . . . a short, commanding ring!

The girl flew to the door.

Without a word Mother Gregory stepped into the house.

She looked all around her. Then she turned her eagle eyes upon her beautiful daughter-in-law.

In her expensive dress of gray silk, Gloria held a duster in one hand, and the torn shawl in the other.

"I like your working clothes," Mother Gregory said scornfully. "Where's your apron?"

Then her voice became more gentle.

"Come in and sit down, Gloria," she said quietly. "I want to talk to you. Maggie told me about the drunken party you had here last night. But I couldn't believe all she said . . . until just now! . . . Gloria, do you think you're starting the right way, in this marriage of yours and Dick's?"

"I don't know what you mean," the girl replied stubbornly.

Mother Gregory leaned over and took her hand.

"You know Dick hasn't much money," she said seriously. "You know he spent all his savings getting this house ready for you. His father gave Dick the money for your wedding trip as a present. . . . Dick's a poor young lawyer, with his way to make. Are you helping him by giving these hundred-dollar parties? . . . Maggie said you paid thirty dollars for flowers alone for it!"

"Well . . . and what else did Maggie say? What other tales did she carry to you?" asked Gloria. Her tone was sarcasm itself.

Mother Gregory cleared her throat.

"She said that my son and Mrs. Hough were the only two sober people in this house last night . . . except herself!" Dick's mother answered. "She said that you had to be carried upstairs and put to bed . . . Gloria, Gloria, what kind of a woman has my boy married?"

Gloria said nothing. She could hear the ticking of the hall-clock in the stillness of the house.

Then the front door opened and closed. Dick stood in the doorway.

As soon as Dick came into the room Mother Gregory rose to go.

She gathered her furs around her shoulders and adjusted the veil on her imposing hat.

"I just ran in to have a little chat with Gloria," she said, smiling as pleasantly as any afternoon caller. "But I must run along, now. Perhaps you'll come along and tuck me into my car, Richard?"

Gloria watched her tall husband and his mother walk down to the curbstone. They stood talking beside Mother Gregory's car.

"About me, I'll bet!" Gloria said to herself.

Why had Mother Gregory stopped scolding her the minute Dick came into the room, Gloria wondered.

Was it because she didn't want to upset Dick and his delicate stomach by a quarrel?

Or was it because she didn't want him to know that she was interfering in Gloria's affairs . . . in the running of her house?

If that was the case, Gloria made up her mind that she'd tell Dick just what Mother Gregory had said to her! . . .

She'd let him know that his mother couldn't come into their house and try to arrange their lives for them!

The very idea of her trying to tell Gloria whether she was to serve hard liquor or lemonade at her parties! It was none of her business!

"Your mother's just like the mothers-in-law in the funny papers," she said when Dick came into the house. "She's been trying to tell me I shouldn't have had cocktails at last night's party. Gosh, I'd hate to sit through one of her bone-dry dinners. They must be ghastly!"

Dick didn't answer her. He stood watching her futile efforts to wipe some stains from the hall mirror.

"Here, give me that duster!" he said finally. "You shinny upstairs and make the beds. I'll clean up, down here. . . . I'm the world's best parlor maid, if you only knew it!"

Gloria stood watching him for a minute or two.

In his own way, Dick was quite good-looking, she thought.

He was tall and thin. And there was an eager look in his face . . . in the quick movements of his body . . . that made him seem splendidly alive.

. . . Of course he wasn't handsome, like Stan Wayburn.

Gloria knew every detail of Stan Wayburn by heart. The cleft in his chin, his polished black hair, his ice-blue eyes . . . and his thrilling way of looking at you.

Dick came toward her across the living-room, shoving the vacuum sweeper ahead of him as he came. He left broad dusty streaks on the rug behind him.

Gloria laughed.

"Gosh, but you're doing a bum job of house cleaning!" she said. Dick dropped the sweeper and caught her in his arms to kiss away her laughter.

"No! No!" Gloria cried. With all her strength she pushed him away from her and ran upstairs. . . .

Stan Wayburn had held Myra in his arms just that way last night!

. . . The very thought of him was like a knife twisting in her heart.

What was there about Myra Gail that made all the men fall in love with her, Gloria wondered.

Myra, with her sullen gray eyes, wasn't even pretty. She

talked very little in her drawling, husky voice. She did not try to please any one, particularly.

It must be her clothes that made her so alluring . . . that turned the trick, Gloria decided.

For there was no doubt that Myra had wonderful clothes. She bought them in Paris.

. . . Gloria stopped making beds and opened the door of her clothes-closet.

With a new scorn she surveyed the dresses hanging there. A few weeks ago when she had bought them for her trousseau she had thought them beautiful.

Now she saw that there were too many ruffles on them, too many buttons, too much fringe. Even the colors were wrong! . . . They should be subtle greens and dusky grays like Myra wore . . . instead of bright blues and frantic reds.

Well, was there any reason why she shouldn't have clothes like Myra's if she wanted them?

Of course, if she asked Dick for them he would be sure to say he couldn't afford them for her. But she wouldn't ask him! . . . She would simply go and buy them!

After all, it was no crime to have a few becoming clothes, was it?

. . . She would buy a dress of cream and amber to match her skin and hair!

She would buy black velvet to set off the pearly whiteness of her neck and arms! . . . And a scarf of real lace like foam along the edge of a wave!

She would beat Myra Gail at her own game! Stan would never look at Myra again!

Not when he saw Gloria with her loveliness dressed as it never had been dressed before!

She wished that it were Monday morning instead of late Saturday afternoon . . . so that she could go downtown and begin to shop, then and there!

By the time Gloria had made the twin beds and had hung a neat row of face towels in the bathroom, it was dark.

Downstairs she could hear the faint rattle and clatter of dishes. She supposed that Dick had finished straightening the house in his slapdash man's way, and was washing the glasses from last night's bout.

She fluffed up her hair, dabbed her nose with a powder puff, and started downstairs.

Halfway down the flight of steps she stopped. From the kitchen came the rich odor of broiling ham. . . . Dick must be getting supper!

Gloria had a sudden feeling of distaste for the house with its reminders of last night's hilarity. She wanted to get out of it . . . to go somewhere . . . to a restaurant . . . anywhere.

. . . Above all she wanted not to be alone all evening with Dick.

She ran into the kitchen.

Dick had on one of Maggie's gingham aprons. He was standing before the stove brandishing a toasting fork.

"Oh, take that thing off!" Gloria cried. "I hate to see a man in an apron, fussing around the kitchen. It doesn't look manly!"

Dick took off the apron and handed it to her.

"Well, if my wife doesn't know how to cook, and won't try to learn to cook, I can't starve, can I?" he asked. "Somebody's got to get our supper. . . ."

"I don't suppose it's occurred to you that there are restaurants in this town?" Gloria asked saucily. "And anyway it's Saturday night . . . we ought to go out and bat around a bit."

She turned out the gas under the broiler.

"Going out to eat is just twice as expensive as eating at home," Dick said. "And, gosh, I'm tired after staying up nearly all last night. I'm all in, as a matter of fact. . . . Come on, Gloria, be a sport, for once, and say you'll have a fried ham sandwich at home!"

"Not a chance!" Gloria cried. "I didn't have any lunch to-day, and I'm as hungry as a bear. So hitch up the car, old thing, and we'll drive downtown for supper. . . . And maybe we'll get wild afterward and go to a movie, eh, wot?"

She ran upstairs, whistling as she went.

Dick stood alone in the bright untidy kitchen.

He was still shaky from his attack of "flu" earlier in the week.

His head and his eyes ached. He was tired to the point of nausea.

He wondered how he could sit through a restaurant meal and a moving picture show afterward. . . .

He put on his hat and went out to the garage to start the car.

Upstairs in her room Gloria was pinning on a black lace hat she had bought in Montreal during her honeymoon.

Ah, she had not gone wrong on that hat! It was perfect.

It cast faint shadows under her eyes, and brought out the ivory of her skin.

She was twice as beautiful in that hat as in any other hat she ever had on her head! And why? . . . Because it had cost twice as much as any other one that she had ever owned.

Oh, there was no getting away from the fact that anybody could be good-looking who had good-looking clothes! . . . and when you had beauty to start with as she had . . . well, you were just plumb crazy if you didn't insist upon beautiful clothes to bring it out! They were your due. . . . They were her due . . . Gloria's! . . . And, by jinks, she would have them!

CHAPTER X

"RIKKY-TIKKY-TAVY," Gloria said when they were seated in the restaurant, "I hope you meant what you said this morning when you told me I could hire a new maid to take Maggie's place."

Dick looked up from the dinner menu.

"Why?" he asked. "You haven't hired one already, have you?"

Gloria nodded.

"I was going to talk to you about that, to-night, and it slipped my mind," Dick said. "I was going to ask you if you could get along with a laundress and cleaning woman for a while. . . . Somehow or other it's costing us more to live than I figured it would, and I'm no millionaire, you know."

Gloria drew lines on the tablecloth thoughtfully.

"I've hired an awfully nice-looking Swedish girl," she remarked, after a time. "She says she can do all the work in our house."

Dick gave the waiter the order for dinner.

"How much are you going to pay her?" he asked.

"Eighteen dollars a week," Gloria said bravely.

"Eighteen dollars a week!" repeated Dick. "Great Scott, Gloria, you must have lost your mind! I can't afford to pay a maid \$18 a week and board her, besides! It'll cost me \$100 a month, easily. I can't do it, honey. . . . I just haven't got the money!"

"I've told her to start work in the morning, and she's coming," Gloria said. "So we'll have to keep her for a little while."

She raised her limpid eyes. Across the restaurant at a corner table sat Stanley Wayburn. He was looking straight at her.

Wayburn was not alone.

Facing him across the table, with her back toward Gloria, sat a woman in a gray suit.

Was it Myra Gail?

. . . Presently the woman half-turned in her chair. Gloria saw that it was not Myra.

This woman was blond. She seemed strangely familiar, too. Where had Gloria seen her before?

. . . Then suddenly she remembered. The woman was an actress in Stan's company at the theater . . . Sonya Chotek!

The waiter took away the soup plates and served Dick and Gloria with veal cutlets and creamed cauliflower.

Gloria tried to eat. . . . But she couldn't. There was a lump in her throat, and her eyes were full of hot, jealous tears.

Oh, why did she let Stan Wayburn make her feel this way? . . . Why should it make her angry and jealous to see him with another woman?

Gloria gave her plate a little push, and laid down her fork.

"I don't believe I'm hungry after all," she said to Dick. He looked up in surprise.

"Well, you sure are some kid!" he exclaimed. "You drag me 'way down here and order a three-dollar meal . . . and now you can't eat it!"

"I know . . . I'm sorry," Gloria said.

She sat there miserable while Dick finished his meal in puzzled silence.

"What do you want to do . . . go to a movie?" he asked as he helped her on with her coat. Gloria shook her head.

"Let's go home. I'm dead tired," she said. She was, suddenly. Her spirit drooped like spent wings.

She wanted to get out of that hateful restaurant . . . away from the sight of Stan and his Sonya Chotek!

She remembered a line of poetry she had heard somewhere . . . "Life is a headache in a noisy street."

And so it was! . . . It hurt unbearably at times. Now, for instance. . . .

Early the next morning Ranghild Swanson knocked on the kitchen door.

Gloria heard her and ran downstairs to let her in.

"I came to start work, even if it is Sunday," Ranghild said. "But I've been to early church already."

"The better the day the better the deed, Ranghild," Gloria told her laughingly.

The very sight of Ranghild cheered her up. She was so blond and smiling that she seemed to have brought the morning sunshine into the kitchen with her.

And she could cook! Even Dick had to admit that the cherry pie she baked for dinner was as good as any that Maggie had ever made.

"But we can't afford her," he said to Gloria. "You'll have to look around and find some one who'll work for us for about \$10 a week. That's my limit, absolutely!"

Gloria didn't answer. She walked around the table to Dick and kissed him with little, light coaxing kisses.

"All right, go ahead and vamp me all you want to!" Dick bantered. "But I mean what I say all the same. . . . We've just got to cut down on our household expenses. A few more weeks like this last one would land me in the poor-house!"

The next morning Gloria could hardly wait for Dick to leave for the office. The moment he was out of the house, she ran upstairs and dressed for the street.

A half hour later she was strolling down the avenue.

Behind their plate-glass fronts, the store windows bloomed like gardens, so filled with color were they.

Here a hat perched airily on its stand above a rainbow pile of imported handkerchiefs . . . there a beaded bag caught the light, like a bit cut from some rare old tapestry.

Gloria sighed with joy . . . she would have that very bag in a few minutes!

She opened the swinging doors of the store and went straight to the business office.

"I am Mrs. Richard Gregory, Junior, and I would like to open a charge account," she said calmly to the hard-eyed credit manager.

She gave Dick's office address and the name of his bank.

"All right, Mrs. Gregory," the credit man said cordially, after he had looked up Dick's references. "The store is yours. And we'll do everything in our power to please you."

He opened the glass door of his office with a flourish, and bowed Gloria out, quite as if she had been a queen.

This was the only way to shop! . . . No bargain-hunting, no counting out change! Simply to ask for what you wanted, and order it sent home!

"I'd like to see afternoon, dresses . . . something really

good," Gloria said to the saleswoman who came toward her across the gown department.

She sat in a comfortable chair while the saleswoman brought in dress after dress. Finally Gloria chose three . . . a peacock blue, a black velvet, and an old-rose crêpe.

"I'll try those three on, and see which one suits me best," she said.

They were all wonderfully becoming.

Gloria couldn't make up her mind which one to buy. She was in delicious despair.

"Madam is lovely in any of the gowns!" the saleswoman declared.

She knew her business, that saleswoman!

"Why does not madam take them all?" she asked carelessly.

"It is not every day that she will find three so perfect gowns!"

Gloria hesitated.

"But the price!" she breathed.

"Only three hundred dollars for the three of them?" the saleswoman asked in surprise. "But that is nothing! They were twice that much at the beginning of the season! They are a bargain . . . those dresses!"

"All right, I'll take them all," Gloria said suddenly. She felt that she simply couldn't go away and leave one of those three wonderful dresses in the shop for some other woman. . . . They belonged to her! They were made for her! All three of them!

"Of course, I don't really need a hat . . ." Gloria thought, as she drifted into the millinery department. But down in the bottom of her mind she knew that she was going to buy one.

"I'd like a dress hat . . . something with plumes, I think," she said to the white-haired woman who came forward to serve her.

The saleswoman shook her marceled head.

"No plumes," she said smiling, "for so young a face. We must keep you very simple. . . . Won't you have this chair, please?" She glided away.

Gloria watched her opening and shutting drawers and cupboards.

In a few minutes she came back with a wide-brimmed hat of creamy satin.

"Here's madam's hat," the milliner said, setting it on Gloria's red-gold head. "Simple but smart!"

. . . The saleswoman was right! It was Gloria's hat. She graced it.

"How much is it?" Gloria asked.

"Fifty-five dollars," the milliner answered in the tone she might have used in saying "two for a nickel."

Fifty-five dollars! Gloria wondered what Dick would say if she paid that much for a hat that hadn't a scrap of trimming on it. . . .

In the end she took it—charged it to Dick.

Next Gloria bought the beaded bag she had seen in the show-window. It was thirty dollars.

"Charge it and send it," she said. She gave her name and address with a feeling of excitement. She had never owned a charge account before in her life.

. . . They were like wishing rings, these charge accounts. You simply ordered what you wanted . . . murmured "Charge it" . . . and it was yours!

On her way out of the store Gloria stopped at the toilet-goods counter.

Idly she picked up lipsticks and eyebrow pencils in their silver holders. She needed neither.

Her lips were a natural scarlet. And the black lashes, planted thick around her eyes, gave her a "made-up" look, as it was.

. . . Still, she could always use face cream and scent.

"I want some perfume," she said to the pretty clerk who came to wait upon her. "Not rose or violet. Something spicy and oriental."

Finally she bought two kinds . . . mimosa and lotus-flower.

After that she bought nail polish, night-cream, bath-powder, and a large wooden bowl of elder-flower soap that would float in the bath-tub.

"Twenty-two dollars," said the saleswoman, adding up the cost of these luxuries.

"Charge it," Gloria said.

The noonday whistles were blowing when Gloria left the store. The street was filled with business girls on their way to lunch, their faces gay and fresh as flowers.

And to think that only a few weeks ago she had been one of them! Why, it had taken her months to earn as much money as she had spent that morning on a few clothes!

How long would it take Dick to earn that \$400?

Gloria knew that he wasn't half as rich as she had once supposed he was. . . .

Suddenly she was frightened at what she had done. She made up her mind to telephone the store to say that she didn't want the things she had just bought. . . . No, by jinks, she did want them! And Dick would just have to pay for them, by some hook or crook!

Gloria hurried home and waited for her purchases to be delivered.

Late in the afternoon they came.

She rushed up to her room and tried on the three new dresses . . . one after the other, quickly, before Dick should come home.

Ah, they were lovely! And she was lovely in them. . . . She tried to see herself with Stan Wayburn's eyes as she turned and twisted before the mirror.

Gloria leaned across the dressing-table and smiled at her dazzling self in the glass.

"You darling!" she said.

Then she heard the sound of Dick's latchkey in the door downstairs!

And before she had had time to take off the new blue dress she was trying on, Dick was in the doorway.

"So here you are . . ." he began and stopped.

His eyes swept the room, from the dresses slung over the foot of his wife's bed to the wrapping paper that littered the rug.

Then he looked at Gloria with a question in his eyes. She was speechless.

"Well, what have you been doing, buying out the town?" he asked.

Gloria smiled. "Hardly that, dearest," she said. "Just a dress or two."

She came toward him swaying like a model in a style-show. Her lips were pursed up for a kiss.

"Kissums sticky mouf," she said babyishly.

Dick kissed her with the utmost gravity.

"Where did you get all these clothes?" he asked.

"From my generous husband. . . . I charged them to you," Gloria answered. "Now don't be cross, please. I really needed a few things."

Dick frowned.

"But you just bought a new dress last week for your party," he said. "What's the matter with it?"

"Oh, that thing!" Gloria answered, her lips curling. "My old dressmaker made it. . . . It had no style."

"I thought it was beautiful," Dick said helplessly.

Downstairs Ranghild was striking the Chinese dinner gong.

"You know, Dick," Gloria said after dinner, as they sat before the wood fire in the living-room, "a woman needs more clothes than a man does."

Dick lowered his newspaper and looked at her.

"How much did you spend to-day?" he asked.

"Only a little bit over four hundred dollars," Gloria said.

"But wait until you see all the lovely bargains I picked up!" she cried before he had time to answer.

She ran upstairs and dressed herself in the new black velvet dress. Then she put on the cream-colored hat, and dabbed mimosa perfume behind her ears and under her chin.

"Don't I look like a million dollars?" she asked excitedly when she came down, again.

"You sure do," Dick admitted. "But I want to show you something. . . ."

He took a black leather book from his inside coat pocket.

"Oh, don't show me figures, please," Gloria protested. "I don't understand them, and they make my head feel all fuzzy inside. . . ."

"These won't," Dick said. "Look here, I haven't four hundred dollars in my checking account! And I'm paying for some telephone company stock that I'm going to give you for your birthday. . . ."

"Oh, don't! I don't want it. Give me an automobile, instead!" Gloria cried, clasping her hands. "I've just got to have an automobile! May and Myra and all the girls have one!"

"May and Myra have rich husbands," Dick answered. "You've married a poor man, and you'll have to get used to being a poor man's wife. . . . I'll teach you to drive my roadster, and you can use that to go to your bridge club and lunch parties."

Gloria pouted.

"I don't want that old ark," she said drearily. "I want a little closed car like the one your mother has."

"Give me time, and I'll be able to get things like that for you," Dick replied. "In another ten or fifteen years. . . ."

"Ten or fifteen years!" Gloria broke in. "Why, in ten or fifteen years I'll be an old woman! I won't care about parties and beautiful clothes, then!"

Dick laughed at her.

"You'll be a very attractive woman in your early thirties," he said. "And you'll find that your taste for clothes will be just as strong as it is now . . . stronger, perhaps.

"In the meantime," he went on, looking at her gravely, "you'll have to economize a little. . . . Now, I want you to promise me that you'll never go downtown and run up bills on me again, without asking me about it first. . . . Will you promise me that?"

Gloria looked him straight in the eye. Slowly she shook her head.

"No," she said clearly. "I won't make any such promise . . . for I know I'd break it. I'm going to have clothes. . . . I won't look like a frump. Don't you want me to be as well-dressed as other women?"

"I can't say that I'm particularly crazy about having a clothes-horse for a wife," Dick answered, picking up his paper. "And there's just one more thing I have to say . . . I can't be worried to death about bills and expenses at home, and do anything like my best work downtown every day."

Gloria smoothed down the folds of her black velvet dress thoughtfully.

"Other men seem to buy their wives an occasional dress or two," she remarked with cutting sarcasm. "And I don't notice that they crack under the strain. Good night, I think I'll go to bed. There's no use trying to sit up and talk to you when you're wound up for one of your sermons on economy. . . . Jiminy, but I wish I were still earning my \$25 a week! Then I wouldn't be jawed to death every time I spent a penny!"

She went upstairs, but not to bed.

She spent an hour brushing her hair, polishing her nails, cleaning her face carefully with cold-cream and cold water . . . putting her new clothes away in sachet powder.

CHAPTER XI

BEFORE ten the next morning May Seymour telephoned Gloria.

"Hello, Lazy-bones!" she said in answer to Gloria's sleepy "Hello."

"I've been up for two hours," May went on proudly. "Bathed Mah Jong already."

"Did you call me up to tell me you'd given your dog a bath?" Gloria laughed. "I have something better to tell than that myself . . . I've got a lot of new clothes to show you. Bought 'em yesterday."

"Well, doll yourself up in some of them and we'll go downtown and jazz around a bit," May said. "I'm blue as indigo . . . and I don't know why. Found a gray hair in my brush, for one thing, this morning! Think of it . . . gray hair at twenty-five! . . . What do you suppose I'll look like at forty?"

"Just the way you do now," Gloria comforted her. "Brunettes don't fade, May. And there's a lot of good hair dye on the market when you really need it. . . . What time will you call for me?"

"Oh, about twelve," May said, and rang off.

Gloria set about the serious business of dressing.

She had just finished by the time May honked the horn of her car outside the house at noon.

"If any one telephones for me when I'm gone, please say I'm having lunch at the Vandermore with Mrs. Seymour," Gloria told Ranghild, who was cleaning silver in the pantry. She had a vague idea that Stan might take it into his head to phone her.

"Well, will you kindly take a look at the Fifth Avenue kid!" May exclaimed as Gloria opened the door of the automobile and stepped in. "That's the best-looking hat I ever saw in my life!"

"I'm glad you appreciate it. . . . Dick all but killed me

for buying it," Gloria sighed. "My goodness, to hear him talk you'd think I'd committed a murder instead of buying myself a few clothes!"

"That's the way with all the men," May sympathized as the car sped through the sunny streets. "I tell you, Gloria, a woman has to fight for everything she gets in this world! . . . I've broken John of his everlasting ding-donging about bills, though. . . . Every time he razzed me for spending money I turned right 'round and spent some more! . . . Now he's afraid to open his mouth about bills."

May set her painted mouth in a straight firm line.

"What does a girl get out of marriage but a few clothes and parties, and a houseful of furniture to keep dusted, anyway?" she went on after a moment. "Nothing else at all! . . . But a man's marriage just doubles his interest in life. He still has his business, and a home and wife on the side! Whereas a girl gives up everything when she marries."

Gloria thought this over. Surely May hadn't given up everything when she married Dr. John. She certainly had not given up Jim Carewe, for instance. They still went around together as they had before May's marriage.

Dr. John was a mystery to Gloria. Didn't care if his attractive young wife and Jim Carewe lunched together two or three times a week while he, himself, was making his calls? . . . Or did he care so much for May that he let her do as she pleased, so long as she was content to be his wife? . . . Gloria couldn't figure it out.

May parked her car outside an automobile salesroom.

After the two girls had shopped and lunched they decided to go back to Gloria's house to look at her new clothes.

Gloria was vaguely unhappy.

Somehow or other she had had a wild hope that she would see Stanley Wayburn in the restaurant where she and May had lunched. When she had dressed that morning, she had been dressing, half-unconsciously, for Stan's eyes.

And she had not seen him.

"Look at that blue car there in the window, Gloria." May indicated a glossy little roadster in the window of the showroom across the sidewalk.

Gloria looked. The little car was a beauty.

Its dark blue sides shone like satin. Its trimmings were of polished brass.

"Just for the fun of it, let's go in and price it," Gloria said impulsively. They went in.

"That's our new 1925 model," said the natty young salesman, opening the door of the car so that Gloria could get into it. "The very best buy on the market . . . \$1800 exactly!"

Gloria sat down behind the wheel. The soft springy seats were covered with blue leather. And on the dash was a tiny clock set in dark blue enamel.

"This car drives as easily as a one-hoss shay. It's an ideal machine for a lady," the salesman said, turning to May.

"You certainly should have that car, Gloria," May said in her metallic voice. Gloria stepped out of the automobile.

That night she asked Dick to buy it for her.

"I don't want any old telephone company stock, Rikky," she said, pleadingly. "And I'm just crazy for this little bus. It's the cutest thing in the world . . . and it would keep your Gloria so snug and warm these wintry days. . . . I could even go to market in it every morning, and bring my vegetables and meats home in it."

That touch about the market was an inspiration, she knew. For Dick loved the idea of her being a housewife . . . picking out her own strawberries and rump-roasts in the markets, and bringing them home.

"I want that telephone stock for you . . . but there is one way I can buy you the automobile," he said finally.

"How?" Gloria asked eagerly.

"If I sell my own car, I'll make enough on the sale to pay down something on the new one for you," Dick said. "I don't suppose I really need that old speedster of mine. It would probably do me good to walk to the office once in a while."

"You do look pale, Dick," Gloria said, "and I'm not saying that just because I want you to sell your car. . . . You really don't look well."

But as the days went by Gloria thought that Dick had forgotten all about the little blue car.

On the morning of her twenty-first birthday Dick was gone when she opened her eyes after a night of deep, dreamless sleep.

"Did Mr. Gregory take his car this morning?" she asked Ranghild when she brought up her breakfast tray.

"He did, ma'am," Ranghild answered. "And an hour ago

a man drove a new car into our driveway. It's standing there, now."

Gloria leaped from bed. She ran downstairs in her bare feet and looked out of the sunroom window. . . .

There it was, with the sunshine striking its polished sides . . . her little blue Winged Victory! Her very own! Gloria thrilled with happiness as she stood looking at it.

While she was dressing the telephone rang.

"This is Miss Briggs speaking," came a cool, low voice over the wire. "Mr. Gregory asked me to tell you that an instructor would be out about twelve to teach you to drive the new automobile."

"Thanks," Gloria said shortly. She hung up the receiver with a bang.

What right had Dick to give Miss Briggs a message like that for her?

Why should Miss Briggs have to know that she didn't know how to run an automobile . . . that her family had never owned one?

And why hadn't Dick telephoned, himself, to wish her a happy birthday?

. . . There had been a time only a few short weeks ago when he had called her up three or four times a day just to hear the sound of her voice.

Oh, well, that was the way marriage changed a man! As soon as he had you, he stopped caring for you . . . evidently. Or, at any rate, he didn't care half so much for you as he had. . . .

The demonstrator arrived a little before twelve and drove Gloria to the neighboring park. As they bowled along, he explained the mechanism of the car to her.

Around and around the park they drove. And at last he let Gloria take the wheel for a few minutes.

"To-morrow I'll be out at the same time, and I'll let you drive," the demonstrator told Gloria as they drove back to the house. He jotted down some instructions for Gloria.

After he had gone Gloria stood on the front steps. It was only three o'clock. She hadn't seen her mother for more than a week.

She decided to walk the long mile to her old home.

Mrs. Gordon saw Gloria coming up the street, from her

armchair in the bay window. She came out on the porch to welcome her.

"Well, I thought you'd forgotten that you had a mother, dearie," she said, her eyes shining with tears, her lips smiling. With arms linked, they went into the house.

"Well, I've had the busiest time of my whole life so far," Gloria explained. "First of all, I gave a housewarming and then I spent a whole day shopping, and I've been picking out a new automobile! . . . And to-day I got it. Dick gave it to me for a birthday present. . . . You forgot that to-day was my birthday, didn't you, Motherkin?"

Mrs. Gordon bridled.

"Indeed I did not!" she said. "I called up this morning to ask you and Dick to come here for supper to-night. The maid said you were still asleep. Then I called again a few minutes ago, and she said you were out. . . . But I went right ahead and baked your birthday cake, anyway."

She led Gloria out into the little kitchen that was more like a sitting-room than anything else.

There was a rocking chair with a red calico cushion in one corner, and the table was set ready for a meal. The family always ate breakfast there.

Gloria went into the dark pantry. On the shelf was a brown crock, half filled with baked beans.

"Yum, yum, my favorite food!" Gloria smacked her lips greedily.

Mrs. Gordon took a plate out of the cupboard. She put a large helping of beans on it, and a slice of cold roast beef.

"There, dearie, while you're eating that I'll call up Dick and ask him to come here to supper," Mrs. Gordon said.

In a few minutes she came back into the kitchen.

"All right, he's coming," she told Gloria. "Now I'll sit right down here and peel these potatoes, while you finish your snack."

"You don't seem a bit excited about my having an automobile, Mother," Gloria complained. "I thought you'd be tickled to death."

"Well, I am," her mother said placidly, "but I'm getting used to seeing you get everything you want, Gloria, since you married Dick. After you came home with that new fur coat I was ready for anything. I could see then that Dick was

going to spoil you . . . by giving you everything that you wanted, or thought you wanted. You're a lucky woman, Gloria. He's a man in a million."

Gloria laughed knowingly.

"He is not!" she said. "It's like pulling teeth to make him spend a nickel! . . . But I've just told him that if he wants me to live with him, he's got to come across with the things that other men give their wives!"

"Gloria Gordon! That's a terrible way to talk!" her mother said in a shocked voice. "And you only married a few weeks!"

"What has that to do with it?" Gloria asked, folding her napkin. "I'm going to start out the right way. Dick's got to know right from the beginning that he can't make a dish-mop of me. Look at yourself, Mother! All your life you've worked your fingers to the bone for Dad and what have you got out of it? Not a thing that I can see!"

Mrs. Gordon peeled potatoes silently, for a few minutes.

"Well, you may not be able to see it, but I have a lot of happiness, Gloria," she said quietly. "Your Dad and I get along pretty well, together. I care more for him to-day, when he's old and broken-down, than I ever did before in my life, I guess. . . . And we're contented, owning this little house of ours. It's paid for, at last, after thirteen years!"

Gloria shook her head. Her mother was beyond her comprehension. She had so little, and yet she was happy. Any one could see that she was happy . . . with the smile that always lurked in her spectacled blue eyes, and the upward twist of her humorous mouth.

"I'll go out and buy some flowers for your table to-night," Gloria said.

"You needn't," Mrs. Gordon answered. "I've nine geraniums in bloom in the front windows. You can go and cut the blossoms from them if you will, for me. . . . And I've bought little red candles to go on the cake."

Gloria went into the dining-room to set the table.

The sideboard drawers were filled with snowy linen. Much of it was darned but the mended places looked like bits of embroidery done by some expert needlewoman . . . as, indeed, her mother was.

At six o'clock Gloria heard footsteps on the front porch. She ran to open the door for her father.

He held her away from him, and looked at her.

"Well, my fine lady!" he said, proudly. "Your old Dad never thought he'd have a princess like this!"

A lump rose in Gloria's throat. He was so little and old . . . her Dad! His whole life had been a disappointment. He had spent years writing a history of the world. And after he had finished it no one would publish it. There were two or three hat boxes up in the attic filled with the manuscript of that life-work that no one would ever see.

. . . And now he was working for a printer away down town for a tiny salary.

As they stood there under the gaslight in the hall, Dick rang the front doorbell. Mr. Gordon let him in.

"How do you do, sir?" asked Dick, towering above the old man. "How's business, these days, with you?"

"Fine as silk," answered Gloria's father, as he helped Dick off with his coat. That had been his answer, always. He and his business . . . everything about him . . . were always "fine as silk." He would have no one's sympathy, and no one's pity. He was as proud as Lucifer.

Mrs. Gordon bustled in.

"We can sit right down to supper as soon as I make the gravy," she said, when she had kissed Dick. "Gloria, you light your birthday candles, please."

Dick followed his wife into the dining-room.

"Did you like your car?" he asked.

"Adored it," Gloria answered, throwing her arms around his neck. "But why didn't you call me up to tell me the instructor was coming instead of letting Miss Briggs know all your business?"

"She knows it all, anyway," Dick replied. "A man's secretary has to know his business. . . . And she's a regular clam, anyway. Never opens her mouth to a soul!"

"Did you have to sell your old car?" Gloria asked. "Ranghild said you drove away in it this morning."

"Sure I sold it," Dick answered. "Where did you think I got the money for the payment on your car . . . stole it?"

"Well, I thought you might have used the money for my car instead of buying that old telephone stock," she said.

Dick put a warning finger to his lips. The kitchen door opened and Mrs. Gordon came into the room with a tray of soup-plates.

After dinner, Gloria's father got up from the table and went upstairs.

Presently he came down with a dusty bottle in his hands.

"Port wine," he said, looking at Dick. "I've had that bottle put away for fifteen or eighteen years. Shall we drink the bride's health . . . or her birthday, I should say?"

"This, I suppose," Dick said, before he emptied his tiny glass, "is the moment to give my wife her birthday present!"

He handed Gloria a folded sheet of thick white paper.

Gloria took the folded sheet of paper that Dick held out to her.

"Birthday present?" she repeated. "Why, I thought my darling little car was all the birthday present I was going to get!"

Dick laughed indulgently.

"Well, I thought I'd better give you two presents this year. Next birthday I may be too poor to give you even one," he said. "Aren't you going to take a look at my gift, Littlest?"

Gloria unfolded the thick crackling sheet. It was a certificate for ten shares of telephone stock. She handed it across the table to her father.

"Isn't that nice?" she asked. "The dividends from it ought to buy me a hat once in a while, don't you think?"

Mrs. Gordon looked ruefully at Dick.

"That girl and her hats!" she exclaimed. "Do you know, Dick, after Gloria was married, I was looking through her clothes closet. And I found eight hats that she'd left on the closet shelf. Eight of them! Not old hats, either, but new fall ones! I fixed two of them over for myself, and gave the rest of them to the neighbors. Half the street is wearing Gloria's castoff hats this winter!"

"Well, now, Mother," Gloria's father interrupted, "that was all right. You can't blame a girl for fixing herself up for her beau, can you? Dick thought he was courting Gloria but she was really courting him . . . with her hats. She was like a bird preening its feathers in mating time, that's all."

"She goes right on preening, sir," Dick said humorously. "She's bought a half dozen hats since we've been married."

"I have not!" Gloria contradicted furiously. "I've had only three!"

CHAPTER XII

"Dick, you make me tired with all this talk of yours on economy, anyhow!" Gloria reopened the subject on the way home. "All you do is preach to me that we're too poor to afford a maid, or a machine, or a few decent clothes! . . . And then you turn right 'round and buy a thousand dollars' worth of telephone stock that means absolutely nothing in my life! . . . What I want to know is how you could afford to do it if we're as poor as you say we are?"

Dick walked on in silence for several minutes.

"As a matter of fact, I couldn't afford to do it. I nearly broke my neck trying to pay for that stock," he said at last. "I borrowed part of the money from Dad. And you know I had to sell my roadster to buy you your car . . ."

"That's right, rub it in! Make me feel like a selfish pig!" Gloria interrupted, "just because I want a car like every other woman in town, your own precious mother included! . . . I swear I'll never ride in the thing! You can send it back . . ."

She stood still in the street and began to cry.

"I don't believe I deserve this outburst from you, Gloria," Dick said. "In fact, I know I don't. And if you want to stand here and cry . . . go ahead and do it! I'm going home. . . ."

But he didn't move. Gloria knew he wouldn't.

She went on crying. Then she felt Dick's arms around her. She put her head down on his shoulder.

"You're so mean to me," she sobbed. They walked on.

"I'm so sorry you think so, sweetheart," Dick said quietly. "I suppose I shouldn't worry you about money matters, but I've been running behind lately. . . . Gosh, I hadn't figured on married life being as expensive as it is! . . . I wonder how people get along who have two or three children to feed and clothe. . . ."

"Well, that's one thing you needn't worry about . . .

babies," Gloria said, "because we aren't going to have any, ever!"

"Not ever?" Dick asked gravely. His hand tightened on her arm. "What's the big idea? Don't you really want children, Gloria? . . . Why, you'd be the sweetest little mother in the world! . . . Why, sure, you want babies, honey!"

In the darkness Gloria's eyes were hard, her lips set stubbornly.

"Don't kid yourself!" she said firmly. "Children are the very last things in the world that I want, Dick."

"You'll feel differently about it later on . . . in a year or two," he assured her. "Every woman wants a family."

"I never will!" Gloria told herself, as they turned into their own street.

Aloud she said, "Let's run out to the garage and see that my car is safe and all right before we go into the house, will you?"

She could hardly wait for Dick to open the garage doors and switch on the light. Gloria walked all around the little blue car with its burnished brass trimmings shining in the electric light.

"Oh, you cute thing! I never thought I'd own anything like you!" she cried, patting the mudguards with her little gloved hands, lovingly.

By the end of the week Gloria had learned to drive the car. She went Christmas shopping in it, bringing it home loaded with beribboned packages.

"You'll just perfectly kill me, Dick, when the bills come in!" Gloria said one morning. "So don't buy me a Christmas present . . . just pay my bills instead, like a good sport! They aren't so awfully big."

But when the bills came in the first week in January, they were very big . . . much larger than Gloria had expected. She was sure that the stores had made a mistake in them, somewhere.

She went over them again and again, with the same result. She owed exactly six hundred dollars . . . two hundred of it for Christmas gifts! Gloria kept the bills in the top drawer of her desk for two days.

On the third day she screwed up her courage to show them to Dick.

. . . She would take them to him at his office.

Miss Briggs would be there, of course. And Dick couldn't scold and rave about the bills in front of Miss Briggs!

. . . Gloria dressed herself with great care. On the way downtown she stopped at the florist's and bought an orchid for her coat.

The windshield mirror told her that she was looking unusually lovely.

It would be much harder for Dick to quarrel with a beautiful wife who had run up \$600 worth of bills than with a plain unattractive one . . .

It was nice to be beautiful. It made things so much simpler!

There was no one at Miss Briggs' desk in Dick's outer office.

From the inner room came the sound of voices.

Gloria sat down in Miss Briggs' swivel chair to wait.

The office was warm. After a while Gloria took off her coat, and then her hat. The tight crown had left a red band on her forehead. She rubbed it gently with her finger tips. . . .

"—and I told him that Mother and I could take care of the two older children. But I guess it's going to be too much for Mother. She's not so very well."

Miss Briggs' voice!

And what was she talking about? . . . Gloria listened.

Silence for a long moment. Then Dick's voice.

"Would it help you any if I gave you a little raise . . . say about five dollars more a week?" he was saying. "Then you could hire a woman to help your mother out with the children."

"Of course, it would help . . . but I think you're paying me all I'm worth now, Mr. Gregory," Miss Briggs' soft voice answered. Her shadow appeared on the frosted glass pane of the door between the two offices.

Gloria rose. She gathered her bills in one hand and opened the door.

Miss Briggs nodded at her, and slipped out.

"Hello, there, Rikky-Tikky-Tavy!" Gloria greeted Dick cheerfully. She perched herself on the corner of Dick's desk. "You'll pardon me for breaking in on your interesting conversation with Miss Briggs . . . but I got tired waiting while she vamped some more salary from you!"

"Hush!" Dick said. He walked over and tried the handle of the door to see that it was shut tight. "She'll hear you."

"It's a good thing I caught you in this generous mood," Gloria went on with sarcasm in her voice, "because I'm calling on money matters, myself!"

She laid the bills down on Dick's desk. He didn't touch them.

"I want to explain to you about Miss Briggs," he said, taking both of his wife's hands in his. "A month or two ago her sister died, leaving three little children . . . and an invalid husband. Miss Briggs and her mother took two of the children to bring up. And Miss Briggs finds they can't do it on her present salary. . . . She's a good woman, Gloria . . . a fine woman!"

Gloria laughed. She tossed back her bright hair.

"All homely women are good," she said. "It's only the pretty ones like May Seymour and me who run up bills and gad all day, and worry their husbands into an early grave, isn't it? . . . I know that's what you're thinking, so I'll say it for you!"

Dick picked up the bills.

"Gadzooks!" he exclaimed. "Six hundred smackers!"

He opened the top drawer of his desk and took out his check book.

"Take a look at the stubs in that!" he said abruptly. "They'll give you an idea of what we're spending!"

Gloria flung the little book down on the desk.

"Why should I look at your old check book?" she asked, hotly. "Your job is to support me . . . not to everlastingly tell me that you can't! . . ."

Two bright spots of color burned like danger signals in her cheeks.

"Other women's husbands buy them things they want!" she stormed. "Are they so much smarter than you? Why is it that their wives can have clothes and things without fighting for them the way I have to? And then you give that Briggs woman a big raise the minute she asks you for it! . . . Oh, what's the use talking about it? There are the bills! And you'll have to pay them, that's all!"

Gloria flung herself out of the office, slamming the door behind her so that its glass pane rattled. She picked up her

coat and hat from Miss Briggs' desk, without so much as a look at her.

Outside in the corridor Gloria stopped and put them on. When she got into her car, she adjusted her hat before the windshield mirror. The orchid on her coat was wilted. Viciously Gloria threw it down into the gutter.

. . . She drove straight through the town out into the bare open country. Ahead of her on the lonely road a man was walking, head down against the high wind.

As Gloria approached she saw that it was Stan Wayburn. She put on the brakes. The car slowed to a standstill, just abreast of Stan. He looked up.

Gloria opened the door of her car.

"Well, of all things! To find you here just when I need you most! Get in!" she cried.

"Why do you have need of me, just now?" Stan asked when the car was under way again . . . slowly, this time.

Gloria laughed gayly.

"Oh, I don't know," she answered, "unless it's that you're always a sort of mental cocktail to me . . . you pick me up."

"You picked me up, just now," Stan parried.

"I did. I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. I was feeling blue. . . . But tell me, what were you doing, rambling around the country all by yourself?" the girl asked.

Stan's hand in its suède glove came down on the wheel over hers.

"I was thinking of some one whom I loved . . . and lost," he said.

"It was your own fault that you lost her . . . that is, if you mean me," Gloria answered. She could feel her heart thumping in her breast.

"You knew I was mad about you a year ago, and that I'd have married you like a shot . . . if you'd asked me," she went on with difficulty. "But you didn't ask me."

"I know," Stan's voice was very low. "But that doesn't make it any easier for me now. . . . It's impossible for me to realize that you're another man's wife!"

He turned in his seat and took the other man's wife in his arms. . . . The little blue car slid to a standstill at the side of the lonely road.

Gloria closed her eyes. There was a new feeling in her.

It was like being flooded with sweet, warm sunshine . . . on this wintry day. She felt, she thought, the way a flower must feel the moment it bursts into bloom.

"Kiss me," she said. "I love you, Stan."

Wayburn kissed her. . . .

An automobile whizzed by on the pavement. But Gloria didn't hear it.

The world for her, at that moment, was bounded by the rough fabric of Stan's coat, as it brushed her cheek . . . by the hard ring of his arms that held her close.

"If he loves me the way I love him, he'll want me to leave Dick," she thought to herself.

But did Stan want her to leave Dick?

Did he care for her as she did for him?

Did he want her forever . . . or for just the passing moment's thrill? . . . Gloria wondered.

She never had been sure of Wayburn as she had been sure of Dick. She never had trusted him. . . . And yet there was no one else in the world who was thrilling to her as Stanley Wayburn was thrilling!

"Here comes a car, Russet. We'd better drive on," Stan said suddenly in a matter-of-fact voice. "There's a farmhouse along here on this road where we can stop for some tea . . . if you'd like it."

Gloria straightened her hat, and started the car.

"I would," she said with a briskness that matched his own. "I had no lunch and I'm famished."

The farmhouse was a low-eaved brown one. A copper kettle hung beside its green front door.

Within they sat at a little table before an open fire.

The plump blond woman who kept the tea-house bustled about in the kitchen that could be seen through the open doorway. Presently there was a smell of browning toast, and of fragrant tea.

Stan leaned across the table. He pulled Gloria's doeskin gloves off, and held her cold hands in his.

He said nothing. He seemed only to want to look at her. His eyes were eager as if he were filling them with her beauty . . . so that he could remember it, afterward.

Gloria knew that she was pretty that day. The wind had made her eyes and cheeks glow. And moreover she was wear-

ing her new clothes . . . the clothes she had bought with Dick's money so that she should be beautiful for Stan's eyes!

"I'm a bad wife," she said in an undertone. "I've no business to be here with you, Stanley, when I've a husband of my own."

Wayburn laughed a little. He pressed her hands, so that it seemed that the little bones in them would snap.

"Don't talk about husbands. Let's not waste our time when we're together talking about anything but you . . . and me," he said. "Do you know that your hair is the nicest color . . . like beech leaves with the sun on 'em?"

"And what color is Myra Gail's hair?" Gloria asked bitterly.

"Don't remember!" Stan answered glibly. "You're a jealous little cat, aren't you, Russet?"

Gloria frowned.

"I am. I admit it," she said. "You quite spoiled my dinner the other night when I saw you in that restaurant with that Chotek woman!"

Stan mused.

"Sonya Chotek, a very capable actress," he commented. "She's had a most interesting career. She was imprisoned in Russia for a year at the beginning of the war. . . ."

"I wish she were there, now!" Gloria cried. "I wish they'd never freed her!"

"They didn't free her. She escaped," Stanley went on, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "Then she went to France. . . ."

"Oh, will you be still about her! I don't want to know anything about the women you're in love with . . . or have been in love with!" Gloria cried.

The farm woman brought in their tea.

"Cream?" Gloria asked.

"No, thanks."

"Sugar?"

"One lump, please."

"I love to pour your tea," Gloria said when the woman had again disappeared into the kitchen. "I love to do little homey things for you."

Wayburn took one of her hands again.

"Pretending that we're married, you and I?" he asked.

Gloria nodded. She couldn't trust her voice.

"It would be nice." Stan's tone was flat.

Gloria knew that he didn't mean it. And yet, somehow, she hoped with all her soul that he did mean it!

They finished their tea and toast. And the farm woman laid the bill on the table.

Gloria took out her tiny mirror and powder box and dusted her nose. She buttoned her fur coat close about her neck, and drew on her gloves.

Stan leaned across the table.

"I'm in a deuce of a fix," he said in a low tone. "I've forgotten my bill-folder. I must have left it on my dresser at the hotel. . . . Will you lend me a couple of dollars to pay the check?"

"Why, of course," Gloria replied eagerly.

In her new beaded bag was a five-dollar bill that Dick had given her to buy gasoline, that morning. She passed it across the table to Stanley.

When the change came Stanley absently stuffed it into his trousers pocket.

"When he gets back to the hotel, and discovers that he forgot to give me my change, he'll have a fit," Gloria laughed to herself.

Outside the clear afternoon light had faded a little. The fields lay brown and barren under the bleak sky.

Gloria felt a little melancholy as she turned her car toward the city. She hated the thought of leaving Stan . . . of going home to Dick, and the dull evening.

"Isn't this *matinée* day?" Gloria asked. "Why, of course it is! . . . Why aren't you at the theater giving the *matinée* girls a thrill?"

"The company's gone blooey," Wayburn said. "It disbanded last Saturday. That's what amused me so back there when you were raving about Sonya Chotek. She left town Sunday. I'll probably never see her again."

Gloria laughed.

"And Myra Gail leaves for Europe soon . . . she and her husband!" she said. "So that both of my deadly rivals will be gone . . . and I'll have you all to myself!"

"Will you like that?" Stanley asked. "I thought all women enjoyed being jealous."

"Enjoy being jealous!" Gloria repeated.

It seemed to her at the moment that the thing she would

most enjoy in the world would be to know that Stanley Wayburn was blind when it came to seeing other women . . . to know that she would never have to be jealous of him again!

"Get over on your side of the road . . . a car's trying to pass us!" Stanley said, looking back over his shoulder. Gloria nosed in toward the right-hand side of the road.

In the car was a woman, alone. She looked sharply into Gloria's car, as she passed it.

Mother Gregory!

Gloria almost ran the car off the road into the muddy ditch beside it, as her eyes met those of Dick's mother.

"Hot bozo!" she cried. Dismay was in her voice.

"What's the matter now?" Stan asked.

"Oh, nothing much . . . except that that was my husband's mother who passed us just now in that car!" Gloria answered.

"Did she see you? Are you sure?" Stan asked.

Gloria laughed mirthlessly.

"I'll say she saw me! And you, too! She looked daggers at us both! . . . Oh, what will I do?"

Stanley pondered.

"Tell the truth," he suggested. "After all, what did we do that was wrong? . . . You happened to meet me out on this road. You didn't know I was here. It was just a chance meeting . . . tell your husband all about it the minute you get home."

CHAPTER XIII

BUT when Gloria ran into her house, Ranghild told her that Dick had phoned to say that he was going to stay downtown for dinner with some men from out of town.

"And Mrs. Gregory telephoned just a minute ago. She wants you to call her as soon as possible," Ranghild said primly.

Gloria sat down at the telephone table and looked up Mother Gregory's telephone number. Slowly and unwillingly she took the receiver from its hook.

Mother Gregory herself answered the telephone.

"I want to see you, Gloria," she said in her quick, business-like way. "Can you run over here for a minute or two?"

"I suppose so," Gloria answered, and hung up the receiver.

Maggie opened the door of Mother Gregory's large and imposing house for Gloria.

"How do you do, Maggie?" Gloria said as naturally as she could. Maggie nodded grimly.

"Mrs. Gregory is in the front parlor, ma'am," she said.

Gloria drew in a long breath, as the dark red curtains of the old-fashioned room dropped behind her.

Mother Gregory was sitting in a Sleepy Hollow chair before the fire. The parlor with its heavy walnut furniture and oil paintings was in shadow.

"Did you want me for anything . . . special?" Gloria faltered. She was afraid of Mother Gregory as she never had been afraid of anybody before in all her life.

"Something very special . . . if you call it that!" the older woman snapped. The thin nostrils of her Roman nose dilated, angrily.

"Who . . . who was that man you had in your car out in the country this afternoon?" she asked. "And what were you doing in such a God-forsaken spot with him?"

"Oh, it's not so God-forsaken as all that!" Gloria answered with all the courage she could command. "You were there, weren't you?"

"Yes, and on a perfectly good errand . . . collecting the rent from the tenant out on our farm," Mother Gregory answered. "Now, I've been frank with you . . . you be frank with me! Who was the man?"

"You wouldn't know him . . . Stanley Wayburn, the actor," Gloria answered. She lifted her head and went on bravely.

"I just happened to bump into him . . . and offered him a lift," she said. "What makes you always think the worst of me?"

Mother Gregory looked at Gloria for a full minute before she answered.

"Well, on this particular occasion," she said, "the thing that makes me think so badly of you is that I plainly saw the fellow's arm around you, Gloria! I was right behind your car for a good half-mile before your friend saw me."

"Spying on me!" Gloria cried disdainfully. "A fine thing to do!"

Mother Gregory laughed with grim triumph.

"You'll stand a little watching, I guess, young woman!" she said. "And now, look here, I'm not going to Dick with this tale. I'm going to let him find you out for himself . . ."

"He wouldn't believe you if you did tell him. And that's all that stops you! Don't think for a minute I don't know it!" interrupted Gloria. "And another thing . . . Mr. Wayburn did not have his arm around me when you saw us! It may have been lying along the back of the seat, but that's all . . . I'll tell Dick about it, myself."

She turned on her heel and went out of the house.

Gloria intended to tell Dick all about her chance meeting with Stanley Wayburn, that night.

But when he came home long after midnight, he told her that he was going out of town for two or three days on business. And she forgot about Wayburn, for the time.

"I'm going to borrow Ranghild's alarm clock," Dick said. "I've got to get up at six to-morrow morning. I think I'll pack my bag to-night."

Gloria watched him sleepily as he moved around the room, folding shirts and underclothing into his kit.

"Aren't you sorry for the way you talked to me to-day down in your office?" she asked.

"Sure I'm sorry. I was a brute," Dick said shortly. He did not kiss her, or make a move to come near her.

In the morning when Gloria awoke he was gone.

While she was having her coffee the telephone rang.

"I'm psychic . . . I knew it was you," Gloria tilted when she heard Stanley Wayburn's deep voice saying "Hello."

"Are you going to be home this afternoon?" Stan asked. "An actor out of a job is a pretty lonely fellow. I need cheering up, Russet."

"And cheering up you shall have," Gloria cooed. "How about three o'clock?"

"Three o'clock is a long way off, but it will do," answered Stan. "I'll see you then, Russet."

Gloria had hardly set the phone down on the bedside table before its bell whirred again. This time it was May Seymour calling.

"What are you doing with yourself, old thing?" May asked. "Want to go downtown for lunch and a movie?"

Gloria giggled.

"I can't, darling," she said. "I have a heavy date with the best-looking man in the world at three o'clock."

There was a long silence.

"I think you're kidding me, Gloria." May's voice when it came over the wire, was puzzled.

"No, I'm not. Honest Injun, Stan Wayburn is coming here this afternoon to have a cup of tea with me," she said.

"What'll Dick say?"

"Dick won't know. He's gone out of town on business," answered Gloria. "He's peeved to death at me, anyway, just now, because I spent a bit of his hoarded cash. I don't think he cares what I do as long as I don't bother him. . . ."

"Well," May remarked thoughtfully, "your friend Wayburn is good-looking, but I'd be careful if I were you. There are queer stories floating around about him. The men don't like him."

Gloria didn't answer.

"I think I'll come over to chaperon you, baby," May said suddenly. "Perhaps I'll bring Jim along, so it won't look queer to your play-acting friend. . . . We'll make it a regular, sure-nough party."

When Ranghild came upstairs for the breakfast tray Gloria told her she could have the afternoon off.

"But before you go make a lot of sandwiches, please," she said. "And see that there's a good fire burning in the living-room. And phone the drug store for some cigarettes."

Gloria couldn't make up her mind which of her new dresses to wear that afternoon. She stood thoughtfully before her clothes-closet.

Not the black velvet. She had worn that the afternoon before.

The old-rose? . . . No.

Gloria took the peacock blue gown from its hanger.

She held it against her, and walked over to the mirror.

Yes, she would wear that. It made her amber eyes look almost green, her hair like molten copper. It was what May called a "mean" dress!

Gloria put it on.

She brushed all the wave from her hair and bound it close around her head with a silver ribbon.

"A bit over-dressed, but . . . stunning just the same," she said to the image of herself in the long mirror.

When Gloria trailed downstairs, Ranghild stared.

"I've been trying to get the drug store on the wire, but the phone is out of order, I think," the maid said, her eyes wide with admiration. "Shall I go next door to telephone?"

"No, never mind," Gloria told her. "Be sure to lock the kitchen door behind you when you go out."

She went into the living-room and sat down before the fire, trying to read. But the words danced before her eyes.

She was waiting with all her senses for Stanley Wayburn's coming.

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER an eternity the bell rang. Gloria opened the front door. May and Jim stood there.

"Well, look at you, all dressed up like a broken arm!" cried May as she danced into the house. "Isn't she grand, Jim? And me in my old sport rags!"

May pulled down the belt of her white sweater, and ran a comb through her short black hair.

"There! I'm all fussed up, too!" she said in her lively way. "I don't see your little boy friend, anywhere. Where is he . . . hiding?"

Gloria laughed.

"He hasn't come," she said. "It's not quite three o'clock, and he has manners, he has! He wouldn't come ahead of time. He must be fashionably late!"

"I suppose Jim and I are guilty of a social error by arriving on time!" observed May. "Well, we brought the life of the party along with us. So forgive us, dearie!"

She showed Gloria what was inside the crown of the sport hat she was carrying . . . a large silver flask!

Gloria's heart sank. She didn't want a "wild" party. She had looked forward to this quiet afternoon with Stan. She was sorry that she had told May that Stan was coming.

"Here comes Wayburn up the street now," said Jim, as he started for the kitchen, flask in hand. And a minute afterward the bell rang.

May and Jim disappeared into the kitchen to make highballs while Gloria opened the door for Stan.

Wayburn threw off his topcoat as he entered. Then without warning he turned and took her in his arms. Gloria pushed him away.

"May Seymour and Jim Carewe are here," she whispered, shaking her head. "They're out in the kitchen . . . mixing drinks."

"What's the idea?" asked Stan. "I wanted to see you alone

... to talk to you. . . . What did you ask them here for? Afraid of me?"

Gloria shook her head, again.

"I didn't ask them, silly," she said. "They asked themselves, as soon as they heard that Dick was out of town."

"Dick out of town . . ." Wayburn groaned. "And we could have had the whole afternoon to ourselves . . ."

"You weren't so wild for my companionship a year ago when you could have had it, you know," Gloria said sharply.

"You'll never forgive me for that, will you, infant?" the actor asked. He put one finger under her soft chin and raised her face to his.

Just then Gloria heard the swinging door of the pantry creak on its hinges.

"Look out!" she whispered. "They're coming!"

The curtains of the living-room parted in. And in marched May with the platter of Ranghild's sandwiches, followed by Jim, carrying four tall glasses of ginger ale. Under his arm was tucked the silver flask.

Stan sat down in Dick's favorite armchair.

"This," he said when he had greeted May and Jim, "begins to look like a regular party. I'm glad I came!"

Jim measured liquor from his flask into each of the tall glasses.

Gloria looked doubtfully at her highball as she stirred it.

At last she set it down on the red lacquer smoking-stand that had been her Christmas present to Dick.

... Oh, why were Jim and May there, with their drinks that she didn't want to take?

Why weren't she and Stan there alone, as they had been alone yesterday afternoon? . . . There were a thousand torturing questions that she wanted to ask him.

And there was one thing she yearned to hear him say to her . . .

"I love you." For he never had.

Jim stared at Gloria and her untasted highball.

"What's the matter, old girl?" he asked. "Got cold feet?"

Gloria nodded.

"I'm afraid to drink since I passed out the other night after those cocktails," she said.

"Oh, where do you get that sweet girl graduate stuff, Gloria?"

May asked bluntly. "Go on, take a drink. You can't be a crêpe-hanger at your own party!"

"I should say not!" Stan nodded vigorously.

Gloria lifted her glass.

"Well, here's to crime then!" she cried and sipped the pale amber fluid slowly.

Stan leaned over and touched his glass to hers.

"I drink to business trips . . . and to husbands who are away on them!" he said in a tone so low that May and Jim couldn't hear his words.

"The chaperons are going into the sunroom, so you won't have to whisper to each other. 'S not polite," Jim remarked in his loud, good-natured voice.

He picked up the plate of sandwiches and followed May out of the living-room.

Stan looked at Gloria with a question in his eyes.

"Chaperons?" he asked. "Explain yourself. Did you ask those two birds over here to-day to chaperon us?"

Gloria shook her head gravely.

"No, not exactly," she said. "I mentioned to May that you were coming to see me this afternoon, and she invited herself and Jim over. Why . . . do you wish they weren't here?"

"I do," Stan replied shortly. He gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

Gloria watched him. She had an almost unbearable desire to cross the room to him, and put her arm around him . . . to hold his dark head in the crook of it . . . to tell him how very much he meant to her.

Nervously she struck a match to a cigarette.

"Hmm, I had a letter this morning that I certainly wasn't looking for," Stan said suddenly.

"From Sonya Chotek, I'll bet a dime," Gloria answered.

Stan laughed.

"By Jove, you guessed right!" he said. "You're a fortune teller."

"I wish I really were. Then I'd know how you feel toward all these women who send you letters," Gloria said bitterly. "How do you feel about Sonya Chotek, for instance? . . . Do you think she's as nice as I am?"

"Oh, gosh, you have it all over her like a tent," Stan promptly answered. And, for the moment, Gloria's jealousy was appeased.

"By the way, did you find out for sure that your mother-in-law saw us yesterday in the car?" Stan asked presently.

"Did I find out? I'll tell the street I found out," Gloria answered. "The minute I came home Ranghild told me she wanted to talk to me . . . so I went over to see her, and she 'panned' me for half an hour about being a bad wife.

"I should worry about anything she says!" she added. "I don't care what anybody says . . . or who sees us when we're together . . . Stan, I don't care about anything in the world except you!"

Gloria knelt down on the floor beside Wayburn's chair. She looked up at him, breathlessly waiting for him to speak. But he said nothing.

"Stan, do you care for me at all? . . . I've just got to know!" Gloria asked at last. Her face was hot with shame. She hid it in her hands.

Wayburn stood, and lifted her to her feet.

"That drink's going to your head a little, isn't it, Russet?" he asked. He pushed her gently back into her chair, and stood looking at her.

"Do you know you're the prettiest thing I ever saw in that blue-green dress you're wearing?" he asked. "You look like the Lorelei. Remember the Lorelei in the old song? . . . Her hair was golden, like yours."

Wayburn walked over to the piano and lifted the lid of it. He sat down and struck a few chords.

Then he began to sing the Lorelei song between puffs at the cigarette that clung to his lower lip.

When he had finished May and Jim applauded loudly from the sunroom.

Wayburn came and sat on the arm of Gloria's chair. There was a smile in his eyes as he looked at her.

"Little tiger-cat!" he said, "aren't you ashamed of yourself for being jealous of Sonya Chotek, or any other woman I happen to meet? . . . Don't think of the other women. Think of just you and me . . . to-day!"

He leaned closer. Gloria shook her head.

"That's just the trouble. I think of to-morrow . . . and to-morrow," she said dismally. "I think of your going away soon, out on the road, where I won't be able to see you . . ."

Gloria's voice dropped to a long sigh.

Stan put a piece of ice into his half-emptied glass.

"Oh, I'm not leaving town so soon as all that!" he remarked. "If that's what's worrying you! . . . There aren't very many new shows at this time of the year, you know. I may be out of a job for months. And in the meantime, I'll probably stay right here, where I can see little Russet every once in a while. . . ."

His hand stroked her hair.

"Gloria!" May called. "Put on a record so we can dance, will you? . . . Something peppy, please!"

Gloria put a new jazz record on the phonograph. Stan swept her into his arms and they danced around the firelit room.

The music beat in the uneven rhythm of a jungle drum.

"Makes you think of tropic forests, and savages dancing around fires . . . that music, doesn't it?" Stan asked, his lips pressed to Gloria's forehead. "Do you like jazz?"

Gloria's eyes were starry as she smiled up at him.

"I like any old kind of music when I'm dancing with you!" she said truthfully. And hated herself for saying it.

. . . Stan should be the one to say nice things! And he wouldn't tell her that he loved her . . . even when she asked him to!

Gloria wondered if he ever had really cared deeply for any woman. She doubted it.

Stan was the handsome, happy-go-lucky type of man that almost all women adore. There probably had never been any need for him to court women. They courted him . . . matinée idol that he was!

The walls of his dressing-room at the theater had been covered with photographs of women. Pretty women, too! . . . Gloria had seen them the day Stan had sent for her to come to him.

How she wished now that she had not gone to the theater that day!

For the very sight of Stan, and the sound of his voice, had brought back to her all the longing for him that she had known in her old days of friendship with him . . . before she met Dick.

"Tell me about your friend May and this Carewe," Stan was saying in an undertone. "Isn't she married to the doctor who was at your party the other night?"

Gloria nodded.

"She is . . . but he's awfully busy, so Jim beaus May around," she explained. "It's quite all right. They're just friends."

Wayburn smiled skeptically.

"'Friend-of-the-family' stuff, eh?" he asked.

Gloria didn't answer. She didn't like any one to criticize May . . . not even Stan! . . . They danced on.

"There's an automobile stopping outside your house," Stan said after a moment. "Are you expecting callers?"

"Heavens, no!" Gloria cried. "Stop the music. . . . It's probably Mother Gregory coming to find out what I'm doing while Dick's away! Somebody take the highball glasses out in the kitchen so she can't see them—quick!"

CHAPTER XV

THE door opened and Dick stepped into the room.

"Jiminy, here's the returned husband!" said May, absent-mindedly returning to Jim's lap.

"Well, where do we go from here?" she asked. "This party's all rain from this point on. I can see that!"

Gloria couldn't think. Her mind was utterly blank.

"Hello, Dick, old man!" Jim Carewe said heartily.

"Hello, Dick," May echoed. "We've been cheering up Gloria in your absence."

"So I see." Dick's voice was cold and hard. His eyes traveled from Gloria to Wayburn, smiling nonchalantly.

Dick's face was white. Gloria was struck by his pallor. Even his lips were whitish gray. Beads of cold sweat were on his forehead.

"Dick, you're sick!" she exclaimed. She went to him, and took his hand. It was cold and clammy.

Dick jerked his thumb in the direction of May and Jim.

"Get them out! Get rid of them!" he said, looking at Gloria.

She held her hands out helplessly to May.

"May dear, I hope you realize that Dick isn't himself. He's sick," she said. "So just don't say anything, but go . . . and send Dr. John over here, will you, please? As soon as you get home?"

Dick walked past her. He stood, scowling and threatening, before Wayburn. The actor rose, and faced him.

"Well, what's your trouble?" Stan asked.

Gloria rushed to him.

"Stan, please don't quarrel with him! Can't you see how sick he is? . . . He doesn't know what he's doing!" she pleaded.

Dick laughed contemptuously.

"Oh, I know what I'm doing, all right," he said. "Don't worry about me! . . . What I want to know is what this fellow is doing in my house! Who asked him to come here . . . you?"

He turned to Gloria and seized her with one hand. His fingers hurt her flesh. She could feel that he trembled violently.

Gloria tossed her head willfully.

"Yes, I did ask Mr. Wayburn here!" she answered. "Was that such a terrible thing to do? . . . To have a few friends in to cheer me up? You hike off on a business trip, never suggesting that I go along! Never thinking that I might possibly be lonely here! And then you get sore because I don't spend my time crying over it!"

She pulled herself away from Dick.

He turned toward the hall. May and Jim stood there, still, waiting to see what was going to happen.

"May, this is your doing," Dick said, his voice trembling. He put one hand on the back of a tall Jacobean chair to steady himself.

"You know that everybody in town is talking about you and Jim," he went on, "so you want to drag my wife down to your own level. . . . Well, you're not going to do it! I forbid you ever to come here again! You, or your lover, either! Now get out . . . both of you!"

May burst into careless laughter.

"Oh, we're going, but not because you say so! We were just leaving when you came," she cried gayly. "And don't you be so sure that I framed this little party to-day. Ask your wife whose idea it was! . . . Come along, Jimmy!"

The pair of them went, leaving a dead silence in the house behind them.

At last Dick broke it.

"Gloria, I wouldn't have believed it of you," he said, mopping his damp forehead. His eyes were fixed on his wife. Gloria, with bent head, stood in the doorway.

Both she and Dick seemed to have forgotten that Stanley Wayburn was still in the room.

"I don't see what there is to make such a fuss about," Gloria said, pouting childishly. "There's nothing so disgraceful about my having two or three people in to tea, in broad daylight, is there?"

"Tea?" Dick gave a short laugh. "The house smells like a distillery, not a tea-room! . . . Was it tea you were drinking from those highball glasses?"

He indicated the two empty ones that stood on his smoking-stand.

"Oh, Jim brought that stuff along. You know how he thinks he has to drink every five minutes or he isn't having a good time!" Gloria said easily. "Stan and I really didn't want any of it."

Stan and I! . . . Dick turned and looked intently at Wayburn as if he had just seen him for the first time in his life. Under the cold steady gaze, Stan shifted uneasily in his chair.

He put out one hand, and chose a fresh cigarette from the silver box beside him. With seeming carelessness, he struck a match to it. He leaned back, puffing idly.

But his wary eyes never left Dick's face.

Gloria felt as if time, itself, had stopped. She held her breath.

Her eyes went first to one man, then to the other. She could see that each was taking the other's measure . . . like two prize fighters in the ring.

Suddenly she remembered that Dick had once told her that he had a savage temper. He had said that the reason he never fought with people was because he was afraid of his own physical violence when his blood was up . . . because he was afraid he might injure his adversary without fully knowing what he was doing!

She had scarcely believed him then. She saw now that it was the truth that he had told her about himself.

His hands were tensed so that they had whitened along the knuckles.

Gloria could tell from the set of his jaw that his teeth were tight-clenched. His face was ashen.

She saw that he was deaf, blind and numb to everything but his own anger . . . that he was quite capable of killing Wayburn then and there!

She could scarcely recognize in him the quiet, self-contained Dick she had always known . . . the husband who had pampered and spoiled her.

With a kind of horror Gloria watched him slowly cross the room and stand before his own armchair, where Wayburn sat smoking. Fascinated, she waited, not daring to move a muscle.

What was he going to do?

But Dick did nothing. He stood perfectly quiet, looking

down at the actor. Gloria saw that the hand that held Wayburn's cigarette was shaking.

Finally Dick's voice cut the stillness like a knife-edge.

"Wayburn, you . . . well, never mind what you are! But I know and so do you! And I know what you're doing here!" Dick said. "I know what my wife's doing here, with you! . . . And that's all ended!"

Stan's mouth went up at one corner in his crooked smile. He flicked the ash from his cigarette before he answered. But Gloria could see that he was terribly afraid . . . that he needed all his acting ability to carry him through this crisis.

"Is that so?" Wayburn asked, carelessly.

Dick turned to his wife.

"Go upstairs while we settle this thing!" he ordered her.

Gloria braced herself. She shook her head, slowly.

"No, I won't go upstairs!" she said. "All this concerns me as much as it does you. . . . Only you're so silly to make a scene about such a trifle! Why, I don't begin to see as much of Stan as you do of your Miss Briggs every day! . . . How do I know you started away on a business trip at all? How do I know that you weren't somewhere with her all day? . . . It looks pretty queer to me—your rushing back here when you were supposed to be out of town! Mighty queer!"

Dick's mouth tightened.

"Get upstairs!" he said savagely. His voice was like a whip.

Without another word, Gloria went.

She fairly flew up the long flight, and stopped at the top to listen. There was no sound from the floor below.

In sudden panic, she flew into the room that she and Dick shared and locked the door behind her.

There was a high excitement in her.

It was the sort of thrill that a cave-woman might have felt thousands of years ago, as she watched two stone-age warriors fighting to the death over her.

She laughed wildly and hysterically.

"Oh, if he were only like that always!" she thought. She shivered at the memory of Dick's righteous anger . . . the cold fury in his eyes when he had ordered her upstairs. He had never seemed so splendid.

And she had obeyed him! . . . For the first time in her life she had obeyed him! . . . She was mortally afraid of him, too!

The telephone on the table beside her bed rang sharply.

"Hello, dear." It was May's voice. "I just called up to see if you were all right. Has your lord and master calmed down, yet?"

"No, he's still ranting around, downstairs," Gloria answered, "but I think he's awfully sick . . . really, I do, May. He looks it. I think that's how he happened to come home ahead of time. He said this morning that he was going to be gone two or three days."

"Don't kid me, Birdie. . . . I'm simple," May answered in her cheerful slang. "I'll bet you a new spring hat that he had a hunch you'd throw a little party as soon as he was gone, and he came home unexpectedly to find out. . . . Well, you didn't disappoint him, did you, dear?"

She laughed. Nothing in the world was serious to May but her clothes, her complexion, and her good times!

"No, you're wrong for once, May," Gloria gravely told her. "Dick wouldn't spy on me. He's too honest and above-board, himself. . . . I'm sure he's sick. Will you please ask Dr. John to come over and have a look at him? Dick's never been quite well since he had the flu before Christmas, you know."

"John's not at home, although I expect him any minute," May answered. "You might try to reach him at his office."

She rang off. Gloria called Dr. John's office. He answered the phone, himself.

"Will you stop in here to see Dick for a minute on your way home?" Gloria asked him. "He came home sick a while ago."

There was a long silence.

"I don't understand, Gloria," Dr. John said at last. "I just saw Dick half an hour ago. He stopped in at my office on his way from the train, looking pretty shaky. I told him to go home and go to bed . . . and that I'd look in on him again, after dinner."

"Oh, I didn't know that," Gloria faltered. "Well, come now, anyway, will you? Please?"

She was afraid to be alone in the house with Dick, after Wayburn had gone. She wished that she had not given Ranghild the afternoon off.

"I'll be there inside of fifteen minutes," Dr. John promised. Gloria could tell he was puzzled.

Swiftly she took off her blue gown and slipped the silver band from her hair. She took a plain black dress from her

closet and put it on. For she fervently hoped that Dick had not noticed how she had decorated herself for Wayburn's visit!

Gloria picked a buffer up from her dressing-table and ran it idly across her shining nails.

She was thinking hard. She began to wonder if Stanley Wayburn was worth all the trouble that he brought into her life . . . the heartbreak, the jealousy, and the lies. . . .

He had seemed a despicable coward downstairs just now, when Dick had faced him with that deadly anger of his. Gloria had seen the fear in Stan's eyes, even when his lips were curled into a sneering smile.

Here she was . . . risking everything to be with him, and she wasn't even sure that he loved her. She couldn't make him say that he cared for her!

Despair swept over Gloria.

Ah, if she only knew! If she could only be sure that Stan loved her . . . nothing else would matter to her then! Nothing!

Gloria threw the buffer down among the silver boxes and brushes on her dressing-table. She unlocked the door of the bedroom.

Without making a sound she crept down the stairs to the landing. She leaned over the banisters and listened.

The two men were just coming out of the living-room. Dick was talking in that same cold monotone. Gloria caught the end of a sentence.

" . . . never again so long as you live," he was saying. "And now, get out!"

Wayburn came into Gloria's range of vision. She could see that he was still smiling. Outwardly he was debonair.

"Very well, I'll go," he said in a slow, leisurely way.

Gloria heard the front door close behind him.

Gloria was certain that the minute the door had closed upon Stanley Wayburn, Dick would come rushing upstairs to hear what she had to say in her own defense. Trembling, she waited. . . .

She ran upstairs and bolted the door of her bedroom. She was sure she heard the handle of the door turn, and then Dick's footsteps going down the stairs.

Gloria presently tiptoed down the stairs and peered between the blue velvet curtains that hung in the doorway.

Dick was sitting in one corner of the davenport. His head was sunk in his thin brown hands.

Gloria thought she heard him give a low groan. But she was not sure whether he did or not.

A sudden rush of pity for him swept over her like a wave. For he must love her the way she cared for Stanley Wayburn . . . hopelessly and helplessly!

. . . And yet Gloria knew that in time she would have forgotten all about Stanley Wayburn if he had not come back. She had all but put him out of her heart during the months before her marriage to Dick.

And why had he had to come back to spoil Dick's life and hers, too? For Gloria was certain that, in a mild sort of way, she would have been quite contented to be Dick's wife all the rest of her days . . . if she had not seen Stan again. . . . He had always been able to sweep her off her feet!

CHAPTER XVI

THE doorbell rang. Gloria opened it to Dr. John.

"Well, well, is the little wife worried?" he asked in his kindly way when he saw her troubled face. "But there's really no need of it. Dick has just another touch of that 'flu' of his. We'll have him straightened around in a day or two. Where is he?"

Gloria led the way to the living-room.

"So this is the way you obey orders, is it? I thought I told you to go home and go straight to bed, young fellow!" Dr. John said.

Dick stared at him dully.

"Go up and put a couple of hot water bottles in his bed, Gloria," Dr. John ordered, taking out his clinical thermometer. "He looks as if he's having a bit of a chill."

The doctor popped his thermometer into Dick's mouth as Gloria turned to go. She found the only hot water bottle in the house after a long search and filled it.

While Dr. John was helping Dick into bed, Gloria telephoned Mother Gregory to come right over.

Then she gathered together her night-clothes, an armful of her boudoir pillows, and the novel she was reading. She carried them all across the hall to the guest-room.

For she had made up her mind to sleep there that night . . . that night, at least.

Dick followed his wife around with heavy-lidded eyes.

"Here's a couple of prescriptions. Better go and get them filled right away, Gloria," Dr. John said, busily writing on a small pad as he spoke.

She took the slip of paper, put on her things and went downstairs.

She drew a long sigh of relief as she stepped out into the blue-gray dusk of early evening.

. . . What a mess life was, Gloria thought.

It made you care for the people you ought not to care for.

It made the people who meant nothing to you at all, fall in love with you.

There was no more plan or pattern to life than there was to a crazy-quilt. Not as much! It was thrown together, so far as she could see.

How much more simple everything would be all the way around, for instance, if Stan Wayburn had been in love with her a year ago as she had been with him . . . and had married her!

Then she would never have seen Dick. And he would probably have married some nice home-making girl who would have kept all his socks mended and given him a houseful of children to make him proud and happy. . . .

While the clerk at the drug-store was filling Dr. John's prescriptions, Gloria went into the telephone booth and called Stan Wayburn at his hotel.

"Oh, Stan, I'm so terribly sorry about this afternoon. I wouldn't have had things happen the way they did for anything in the world," she told him when she heard his voice.

Stan laughed carelessly.

"Don't you bother your cute head about me, Russet, for a single second," he said. "Just forget it. I told your husband where to head in, though, by the way."

"You did!" Gloria's surprise was in her voice. She was sure that it had been Dick who had told Stan where to "head in!" Moreover, she remembered how meekly Stan had obeyed when Dick had told him to get out of the house.

"I certainly told him nothing else but!" Wayburn went on. "You didn't suppose I was going to lie down like a rug and take all his insults, did you? . . . Not on your gay young life, I wasn't! And what's more, I'm going to see you wherever and whenever I want to . . . if you want me to. You do, don't you?"

"Of course, I want to . . . but did you really tell all that to Dick?" Gloria asked incredulously.

"N—no, not exactly that way," Stan admitted.

"Well, I must ring off, now," Gloria said. "Good-by, Stan."

She was vaguely disappointed in Wayburn. She would have liked him to stand up to Dick that afternoon. She wanted to be proud of him, somehow.

When Gloria returned to the house she found Mother Gregory in charge. She had tied a white apron, crackling with

starchiness, over her black silk dress, and she was tenderly bathing Dick's face.

"These colds of his come from his stomach. I'm sure of it," she said accusingly to her daughter-in-law. "He's either been upset over something or his diet is all wrong. Do you give him much fried food?"

Gloria tried to think whether or not Ranghild fried the meat and potatoes very often. She thought not.

"Well, anyway, Dick's to have nothing but egg-nog for his supper," Mother Gregory went on without waiting for Gloria's reply. "You go down and beat it up while I make Dick comfortable for the night . . . and make me a cup of tea, while you're at it. I was just sitting down to dinner when you phoned me, and I came right over without a bite."

Gloria stood looking helplessly at Mother Gregory's broad satin-covered back.

"How do you make an egg-nog?" she asked finally.

Mother Gregory turned and faced her. Her fine black eyes were widened in astonishment.

"Well, I never heard of such a thing! You, a grown woman, not knowing how to beat a little milk and egg together!" she exclaimed. "You sit here and wait for a minute. . . . When I finish with Dick I'll go downstairs with you, and show you how to make an egg-nog!"

She smoothed the pillows under Dick's head. Then she pulled the hot water bottle from between the sheets, and gave it to Gloria.

"Go and empty half the water out of that thing!" she ordered. "Never fill a hot water bottle to the very top. It'll burst if you do. . . . And roll it up in a clean towel before you bring it back!"

Silently Gloria obeyed. Then the two women went down to Ranghild's spotless white kitchen.

"Now then," Mother Gregory said briskly. "Put on your apron and wash your hands and we'll get to work." She bustled about collecting milk and eggs and nutmeg as she spoke.

Gloria had no aprons of her own. She had no use for aprons. But she found one of Ranghild's in a pantry drawer and tied it on.

When the egg-nog was made Dick's mother poured it into a tall glass and set it on a little tray.

"You take it up to Dick while I stir around and get a bite

of supper for us, Gloria," she said. "And see that he drinks every drop of it!"

Slowly and unwillingly Gloria went upstairs. Dick's eyes were fixed on the door as she swung it ajar. She set the tray on a chair at the side of Dick's bed.

"Here's the first meal your little old wife ever cooked for you," Gloria said with a gayety she was far from feeling. Dick merely looked at her.

She slipped an arm behind his shoulders to raise him but he pushed it away.

"Give me the glass," he said shortly. He drained it, and lay down again with his face turned toward the wall. Gloria picked up her tray to go. But before she reached the door Dick had called to her.

"Gloria, you took your things into the guest-room," he said.

"Yes, I'm going to sleep there to-night," Gloria answered. "I think you'll sleep more comfortably if you're in here alone."

But they both knew that was not her reason for going into the guest-room. The thought of Wayburn rose between them like an insurmountable wall.

"Gloria, tell me one thing," Dick said surprisingly. "And think before you give me an answer . . . you're not in love with this Wayburn fellow, are you?" His anger was entirely gone.

"That's not the point," Gloria said coldly. "The point is that you've shamed and humiliated me before my friends. And I'll never forgive you for it. I don't know how I can ever face any of them again."

Dick sat up in bed.

"I wish you never would see any of them again," he said vehemently. "They're not the kind of people I want you to have for friends. I wonder if you know the things people are saying about May and Jim . . . beastly things?"

"Oh, people! People make me tired the way they gossip about everybody!" Gloria said contemptuously. She went out and closed the door loudly.

Mother Gregory had a cold supper laid on the kitchen table. She was drinking tea and reading the evening paper.

"Have you been asked to join the new Home Women's Club?" she asked Gloria, without raising her eyes from the paper. "I put your name up for it. I want my son's wife to belong to it."

"Yes, I've been asked, and have sent in my first dues," Gloria answered as she took her place at the table. "Thanks for putting me up for it. I guess most of the women in town are going to be members, aren't they? I'd hate to be left out."

Mother Gregory pursed up her lips.

"Oh, there are a few women who aren't getting in!" she remarked acidly. "Your friend, Mrs. Seymour, for instance! She'll never be asked to join, if she lives to be a hundred!"

Gloria was silent. She knew now what Dick meant by the "beastly things" people were saying about May . . . and Jim Carewe!

CHAPTER XVII

THAT night Gloria was brushing her hair before the guest-room dresser when she heard a board creak in the hall outside her door.

. . . Was it Dick? She stood there listening. She was sure that she saw the handle of her locked door turn slowly. Then, a few minutes afterward she was sure she heard the stealthy closing of the door of Dick's room. . . . Evidently he had gone back to bed. . . .

The next morning Dick insisted upon getting up at his usual time. He announced, furthermore, that he was going to the office.

"If I give in and stay at home, I'll be getting the 'sick habit' first thing I know," he told Mother Gregory when she arrived at seven, bringing an electric pad and a glass of grape jelly for the invalid. "I'll work this shaky feeling off in two or three hours down at the office."

"That poor boy is going to kill himself!" Mother Gregory later told Ranghild, to whom she had taken an instant liking. She was making milk toast with her own hands for Dick while he dressed.

When he was ill, Mother Gregory had a feeling that nothing that any doctor or nurse could do for him would do him half as much good as the food she, herself, got ready for him.

Gloria, reading the morning paper in the dining-room, listened to the conversation going on in the kitchen.

"That's the way he's been all his life . . . all ambition, with nobody to back it up!" Mrs. Gregory was saying to Ranghild. "I hope you never fry his food or put much grease in it. Grease gives him indigestion quicker than scat!"

"Yes, ma'am, I know," Ranghild answered in her pleasant voice, "but Mr. Gregory doesn't look sickly to me. He's that wiry kind of person . . . if you know what I mean. They can stand anything."

The pantry door swung open and Ranghild came into the

dining-room with the water pitcher. Gloria looked up at her.

"Don't pay any attention to Mr. Gregory's mother, Ranghild," she said in an undertone. "You're working for me, not for her. And she's just telling you all that stuff to hear herself talk, anyway."

With a solemn nod Ranghild went back into the kitchen.

A few minutes later Dick came downstairs. Mother Gregory brought him his milk toast with the prideful look of a Louis Sherry displaying a wedding cake for the Astor family.

"I'm not going to sit down with you. I had my breakfast at home before I came," she said. "So I'll just take the paper into the sunroom with me for a few minutes . . . if no one's reading it."

She rustled blandly away.

Gloria could feel Dick's eyes on her. She did not look up, but tapped her egg and buttered her toast with pretended absorption.

"Gloria," he said at last. She raised her eyes. Dick was white and haggard.

"Dick, you're crazy to try to go to the office, to-day," she said. "Why don't you stay home and rest? Dr. John will have a fit when he finds out you've gone to work."

"Never you mind about me, Gloria. It's you I'm thinking about, just now," Dick answered in a low tone. "I've been lying awake most of the night thinking about you, to tell the truth. . . . Look here, Gloria, did you love me or not when you married me?"

"Oh, dear, do we have to go into all that right now? Can't we have one meal in peace?" Gloria's voice was pathetic. "First of all we row about money and maids . . . and now you want to raise the roof again, I suppose, about yesterday afternoon. Let's forget it."

"I wish I could," Dick answered. "But it's a pretty serious thing for a fellow to come home and find his wife entertaining another man . . . especially a duck like Wayburn!"

He came over and put his arms around Gloria.

"Honey, I know there was nothing wrong about your little party, yesterday. You were bored and you wanted a little thrill, a taste of excitement. But other people won't see it that way. They'll soon be saying that my wife's in love with that cheap actor. . . . They'll have you in the May Seymour class first thing you know!"

"What's everybody down on May for?" Gloria asked. "I don't blame her a little bit for going around with Jim Carewe if her own husband won't take her anywhere! . . . Why doesn't he get next to himself, and see that he's losing May?"

Dick pondered.

"I suppose he's too busy. And anyway, a husband is always the last person to hear rotten gossip about his wife," he said.

He was looking out of the dining-room windows that faced the street, watching the Donberg twins who lived next door. They were running races with their new Airedale pup . . . their sturdy legs twinkling past each other like the parts of a perfectly-gearred machine.

"Gosh, Gloria, wouldn't it be nice if we had a couple of little kids like those two?" he asked, tightening his hold of her. "A couple of jolly little youngsters who'd race down the street every night to meet me . . ."

"Yes, and who'd scratch up all the furniture and turn the house into a boiler-factory when it came to noise! No, thank you, sweetie! I'm afraid I'll have to squelch your fond hopes . . ." She wriggled out of Dick's arms and got to her feet.

Dick, with his hands gripped, stood looking down at her.

"Honey," he said, "you're just cheating yourself when you make up your mind not to have children. Why don't you want them? . . . What do you think marriage is for, anyway?"

Gloria laughed stridently.

"How do I know what marriage is for? I didn't invent it!" she cried. "It's not my idea of worldly bliss, let me tell you! I've seen too much of it the last couple of months!"

She walked out of the room.

"I see by the paper that Myra Gail is going to Europe again," Mother Gregory called to her from the sunroom. "My goodness, she must cost that husband of hers a fortune in steamship tickets alone!"

Gloria stretched herself lazily on the chaise longue in the sunroom.

"Well, what's the difference so long as he can afford it?" she asked. "It's a relief to hear of a generous husband once in a while. Most of them are terrible tightwads."

Mother Gregory looked up sharply.

"That's a queer thing for you to say," she said sharply.

"I'm sure Dick's generous with you . . . generous to a fault. As far as I can see he refuses you nothing you ask for!"

Gloria smiled, exasperatingly.

"I haven't asked him for much . . . yet," she drawled.

In that instant she made up her mind that she was going to ask him for something, though . . . a trip to Europe to shop in Paris with Myra Gail!

Ranghild opened the glass doors of the sunroom.

"Mrs. Seymour on the telephone, ma'am," she said to Gloria.

May's voice was tearful.

"Have you been asked to join this big new club they're starting . . . the Home Women's Club, it's called?" she asked,

Gloria said she had.

"Well, I haven't!" May almost shrieked into the telephone.

"I think I'm the only clubwoman in town who's been left out. Everybody I know is joining but me . . ."

She broke down completely. Gloria could hear her wildly sobbing. She had not known that May could take a snub this way. May had always seemed to be hardened against the unkind things that were said about her and her love affair with Jim Carewe.

"Let 'em talk!" she had always told Gloria, recklessly. "When they're talking about me and Jim they're giving somebody else a rest!"

And she had shown the world of gossips a shining armor of defiance. But now that armor was utterly gone. May was defenseless, suddenly, in the face of this new snub.

"Oh, I know what's the matter with the old hens who started the club," May went on presently in a choky voice. "They think I'm absolutely beyond the pale because I lunch downtown with Jimmy once or twice a week. They might know that there's nothing to the whole thing by the frank, open way we see each other. . . . Why, you know there's nothing wrong between me and Jim, don't you, Gloria?"

"Of course, I do!" Gloria said indignantly. She was very glad that she had been asked to join, however. For the first time since she had known her, Gloria had a warm friendly feeling for Mother Gregory, who had managed to get her into the club.

"Well, then, for the love of Maud, go to your mother-in-law, and do what you can for me. She's the head of the membership committee, I hear," May went on more calmly. "Tell

her I'm through with Jim Carewe, if you like. That ought to fetch her!"

"But are you?" Gloria asked, cautiously.

"I—I guess so," May answered. "I've just made up my mind that the game isn't worth the scandal! . . . After all, seeing Jim or any other man once in a while isn't worth the loss of my rep . . . my good name, is it? . . . You've got to play the women's game their way in this world, Gloria, or they won't let you play at all, do you know it? . . . Now do your best for me with Dick's mother, won't you? I've just got to get into that club!"

Gloria promised she would.

CHAPTER XVIII

GLORIA went back into the sunroom, and picked up a magazine, wondering how to present May's very weak case to her mother-in-law.

"That was May Seymour on the phone," she began.

"I wish you wouldn't see so much of that woman," Mrs. Gregory replied. "As I've told you before, she's a thoroughly bad woman. I heard some dreadful stories about her and that good-for-nothing Carewe the other day. She doesn't deserve that nice husband of hers. And as for Carewe, he ought to be tarred and feathered!"

She shook out the paper vigorously.

"I suppose it's from her you got your idea of driving all over the country-side with that actor you were with the other day!" Mother Gregory continued. "She seems to think she can gad all over with Carewe, and never have a word whispered against her! Well, she can't. One of Dr. John's patients brought her name up before the Home Women's Club the other day . . . and it was voted down quicker than it went up, let me tell you!"

Gloria saw how utterly hopeless May's case was.

A burning thread of terror went through her like a dart of lightning. . . . This was what women could do to one of their own sex who stepped over the boundary of good behavior that they have laid down for themselves throughout the centuries!

Women had made May a pariah—an outcast! They had kept her out of their clubs—given her the cold shoulder.

They had shown her that if she wanted to defy them, she would have to walk alone . . . as other foolish and defiant women had walked alone, and worn the scarlet letter of shame and solitude.

Gloria wondered what would happen to her if her women friends knew that she had been seeing Stanley Wayburn alone!

She wondered what they would do when they did find out . . . if they ever did. For Gloria knew she could never refuse to see Wayburn so long as he wanted to see her.

Soon after May's tearful telephone message, Mother Gregory got up to go. She wrapped herself in her black broadcloth and furs that always smelled of moth balls, and pecked Gloria on her cheek.

"Good-by," she said severely. "And I hope that your friend, Mrs. Seymour, will be an example to you of what happens to foolish wives who go traipsing around with men who wouldn't marry them if they had the chance! . . . Decent women simply won't have anything to do with them. And you can tell May Seymour for me that until she gives up that Carewe, she can whistle and wait to get into the Home Women's Club, or any other club where I'm a member! For I'll vote her down every time! She's a disgrace to this town!"

Mother Gregory jerked her veil down over her Roman nose, and swept out of the house like a ship in full sail.

. . . So, Gloria thought, it was Mother Gregory who had kept May out of the club! What a hateful woman Dick's mother was!

And how dreadful for May to know that hundreds of women were against her, wanted to have nothing at all to do with her! To know that dozens of tongues were wagging about her and her affair with Jim Carewe! . . . And yet, Gloria knew that but for the grace of Providence, she might be in the same boat with May Seymour, this very minute!

For some one, besides Mother Gregory, might have seen her and Stan Wayburn in her car, just as people had seen May and Jim together! And there would be talk and talk . . . until the whole town would be talking about her and Stan. . . .

Gloria shivered as she picked up the telephone and gave May's number.

"Maysie, dear, I just finished talking to Dick's mother," Gloria began unhappily when May answered her ring. "I did my very best for you . . . but it's no use! She says there's not a ghost of a chance for you to get into the club. . . . You're right, there has been a lot of talk about you and Jim! At least, Mother Gregory says there has . . ."

"The old hypocrite!" May broke in harshly. "I'll bet she's at the bottom of the whole thing! She's always hated me the way a lot of other women in this town have . . . because I married their dear, dear doctor! . . . Women always have a cozy corner in their hearts for the family doctor. And they sure do hate him to have a wife. I've found that out!"

Gloria laughed in spite of herself.

"But not Mother Gregory!" she protested. "Why, she's old enough to be Dr. John's mother . . ."

"Oh, I don't mean she's in love with him, you poor prune!" May broke in. "That's absurd. But just the same, women like to think that their sympathetic doctor takes a personal interest in all their aches and pains. They love to go to him with their troubles. . . . Oh, I could tell you a thing or two about being a doctor's wife, if I wanted to! You don't know the half of it, dearie!"

May paused for breath. Then she went on in her high voice:

"Well, even if I can't get into a woman's club, I suppose the stores are still open to me. . . . How would you like to go shopping with me this morning?"

"I can't leave the house to-day. I'm busy," Gloria fibbed.

She wondered how May would feel if she knew the truth . . . that Dick had forbidden her to be seen anywhere with May? . . . Not that that would have stopped Gloria, if she had wanted to be seen with May!

But she didn't . . . she was afraid of being talked about, along with her. She didn't want to be classed as a "bird of a feather" with May Seymour. No, indeed!

. . . Gloria began to perceive, dimly, that neither law nor law makers rule this world of ours, but that four little words do . . . "What Will People Say?"

. . . Well, people never would say the things about her and Stan that they were saying about May and Jim, that reckless pair! She would never give them the chance . . . she would be too clever for them, Gloria made up her mind. There must be ways . . . ways of seeing Stan without any one being the wiser! The thought of not seeing him at all did not occur to her.

She went clip-clopping upstairs in her blue satin mules.

Ranghild was cleaning out Gloria's clothes-closet.

The sight of all her dresses hanging there in neat, colorful rows made Gloria think suddenly of Myra Gail.

Lucky Myra! . . . With clothes to burn, here she was getting ready to run over to Paris for two or three more trunksful of them!

And she would come back not only with clothes . . . but

with the latest thing in make-up and hair-cuts, too, no doubt! No wonder she was fascinating!

Gloria picked up the extension-telephone that stood beside the night-lamp. She gave Myra Gail's number.

"I saw by the public print this morning that you're going abroad, Myra," she said gayly when Mrs. Gail's cool voice answered. "How soon are you sailing, dear?"

"In ten days. Why, were you thinking of going along?" There was thinly veiled humor in Myra's tone.

"As a matter of fact, I was thinking of doing that very little thing!" Gloria said with spirit. "I'm tired, and I think a sea trip would be the very thing for me."

"Nothing like it for brushing the cobwebs out of your brain!" Myra commented as she hung up. "Better make up your mind to go along. Love to have you!"

Now, what did she mean by that, Gloria wondered . . . by that phrase of hers, "brushing the cobwebs out of your brain?"

Did Myra think there were cobwebs in her brain? Had she recognized the troubled mental state Gloria was in over Stanley Wayburn?

. . . That was the trouble with Myra, the thing that made Gloria hate and fear her. She seemed to see everything that was going on everywhere, with those cold, gray eyes of hers. She never missed a trick!

Glory turned to Ranghild.

"If I went away for a few weeks, do you think you could manage the house alone?" she asked.

Ranghild went on brushing a green sports suit as she reflected. She was thinking that she had done every bit of work in the house all alone from the minute she had stepped into it!

"I think I could, Mrs. Gregory," was all she said.

"Because I may be going away in a week or so . . . to Europe," Gloria went on.

The sound of her own words excited her. Going to Europe! Of course she was!

She was sure that she could make Dick scrape up the money for the trip, somehow or other. She would be very sweet and appealing with him . . . and he would give her the money. Honey caught more flies than vinegar . . . that was the big idea!

With Ranghild's help, Gloria dragged her wardrobe trunk from the guest-room closet, and dusted it off.

Gloria spent the rest of the day washing out silk stockings and handkerchiefs with soap-chips in her bathroom. She couldn't wait for washday, to get these things packed in her trunk. She was in a fever of excitement.

When Dick came home at half-past five, she was still hard at work, her hair tousled and her cheeks flushed.

Dick looked around the room in blank astonishment. Bureau drawers were flung open. Dresses were flung across the bed. A pile of lingerie lay, white as a cloud, on a chair.

Wordlessly, Gloria smiled at him across the chaos . . . a siren smile from half-lowered eyelids and dimpling mouth.

"What do you think you're doing now?" Dick asked.

"Packing the things that I'm going to take with me," his wife answered.

"Take with you! What are you doing, leaving me?" He sat down on the lingerie piled on the nearest chair.

"Well, I should say not!" Gloria cried. "Did you think I'd leave you just because you were so angry and jealous, yesterday? Why, I like you to be jealous . . . 'cause then I know you still love me . . . see?"

She pattered across the room to him, and knelt beside his chair.

"Would you miss me terribly if I went away for a little while . . . with Myra Gail?" she asked.

Dick sat up with a jerk.

"With Myra Gail? But, good Lord, she's going to Europe!" he gasped.

Gloria nodded.

"So am I," she said calmly, "if you'll let me?"

Dick made a gesture of despair.

"Honey," he said, "you can't go. I haven't enough money in the bank to pay for a one-way ticket . . . Look here, let me show you!"

He took his check book from his inside coat pocket.

"Less than two hundred bucks!" he said. "Hardly enough to pay the current bills! You know, you've been hitting me pretty hard lately with these new clothes you bought, and your automobile . . . and Ranghild's wages."

Gloria walked away toward the windows.

"Oh, sure, it's my fault we never have any money," she tossed back over her shoulder. "I suppose you never spend a cent on those special cigaretttes you're forever smoking, or on taxicabs, do you?"

Gloria laughed impudently.

"Why don't you fire Miss Briggs, and get a stenographer who doesn't expect a small fortune in the way of salary, if you're so terribly poor?" she asked. "Sometimes I think you must be in love with that woman! Honestly, I do!"

Dick stood up.

"You can't go to Europe," he said quietly, and went downstairs.

CHAPTER XIX

GLORIA stood looking out of the window into the darkening street for a long time. She was actually sick with disappointment. . . . All day she had been dreaming of Europe, of Paris, of the shops there.

And now she was not to go! . . .

When Ranghild struck the dinner-gong, she did not go down.

Early the next morning while Gloria and Ranghild were busily unpacking the wardrobe trunk, the front doorbell rang three times.

"That's Mrs. Seymour's ring. Ask her to come up here, please, Ranghild," Gloria said.

Sure enough it was May.

May triumphant! In a new spring suit and a felt hat crowned with lilacs! She was freshly rouged and powdered. And there was a flicker of humor in her green eyes. . . . In short, May was herself again!

"Ah, hah, you thought I'd be in sackcloth and ashes, didn't you?" she asked Gloria in her impudent way, "just because I'd had a turndown from a club of miserable old frumps? Not on your eyebrow pencil! Those dames can't high-hat me, dearie. . . . I don't want to belong to their little group of serious thinkers."

May sat down before Gloria's dressing-table and rubbed some perfume under her pointed chin. She grinned impishly.

"Are you going to join? I don't exactly see you in a Home Women's Club," she said. "You're hardly a homekeeping type, Gloria. I wish you wouldn't join. . . . I think you owe it to me not to! Just to show those women that they can't snub me, and get away with it!"

Gloria set her lips firmly.

"I've promised Mother Gregory I'd join," she said. She had no intention of being an outcast along with May. There were points where friendship ceased. This was one of them!

"I thought you didn't care a darn whether you got into the

club or not, anyway," Gloria went on. "You just said you didn't!"

May bit her lip.

"That was pure bunk," she confessed. "Whistling in the dark to keep up my courage."

May wiped her eyes and blew her nose loudly. Gloria could see that she was having hard work to fight back the tears in her eyes.

"Between you and me, Gloria," she said shakily, "it's all but killed me to hear that they didn't want me in that club. . . . I never used to care what women said about me, but this got my goat, somehow. You take it from me, it's no use trying to buck other women. They've laid down certain lines, and unless a girl follows them, they'll get her . . . they've almost got me.

"Why, this morning when Jim phoned I wouldn't even let him talk to me . . . 'fraid the phone girl might be listening in. And, cross my heart, there never has been anything really wrong between me and Jim . . . just a little foolishness."

Gloria was sure that May was telling the truth.

"I came in to ask you to go downtown with me, but I can see you're too busy," May said naturally, after a minute or two. "Don't forget that I'm having the card-club Thursday, will you? It's the last time we'll all see our loving enemy, Myra Gail, before she goes away next week."

"I thought you liked Myra," Gloria said, surprised

"Yeh, I love her the way you do!" May retorted, making little claws of her two hands. "But just the same I'd rather have her for a friend than an enemy . . . and she's a friend of all these club women who've iced me, besides!"

May picked up a hand mirror and studied her face.

"Ye gods, I believe I'm getting a line between my eyebrows!" she cried, "or is it just a shadow? . . . By the way, isn't this hat of mine the cat's kanittens! I spent all the money for the butcher's bill on it. . . . There's one place where I can knock the rest of the women for a Chicago loop, anyway . . . in my clothes."

Gloria's smile pitied May. She knew that May was far from being well-dressed. Her hat was too garish, her tan shoes too tan, her thin stockings too thin.

Myra Gail was the best-dressed woman in town, when it

came to that. With a pang, Gloria thought of Paris and the clothes Myra would bring home from Paris. . . .

After May had gone, she went back unhappily to the job of unpacking the trunk that was destined not to cross the ocean in the hold of a French boat! . . . How stingy Dick was not to let her go with Myra!

That afternoon a letter came . . . a large white envelope with handwriting that had a certain dash, a careless charm.

Gloria knew, somehow, that it was from Stanley Wayburn before she looked at it. A thrill ran through her as she opened it.

"Russet, dear," it said. "There's so much I want to say to you. And yet when I come to write it, it isn't much . . . just this; I must see you! When? Where? Make it soon. Phone me."

No name was signed to the little note. Gloria didn't like that. It seemed cowardly not to sign one's name to a letter. . . . She would have liked Stan to run chances for her.

But then, she knew he never would. He never had. "Safety First." That was his motto.

She tore the paper up and threw it into the waste basket. Then, fearful lest Ranghild might piece it together and read it, she took the torn pieces downstairs and burned them in the living-room grate.

After that she ran upstairs to her room, bolted the door, and telephoned Stanley Wayburn.

An hour later the two of them were together . . . speeding along the lonely country roads west of the town, in the car that had been Gloria's birthday gift from Dick.

Gloria's heart was like a wild bird suddenly freed from the cage that had bruised its wings.

The eyes she turned to Wayburn were starry with happiness, and wet with tears of relief at seeing him again.

"I've missed you so!" she said. Wayburn's arms went around her like a vise. He kissed her hungrily. Gloria closed her eyes.

"Look out!" Stan yelled. He grabbed the steering wheel just in time to keep them from swerving off the road into the ditch that ran along it.

Gloria straightened her hat, and took a tighter hold on the wheel.

"Well," she sighed, "if I have to die in an automobile accident, I'd rather be with you at the time than any one else in the world!"

Stan smiled grimly.

"I'm not so keen on dying just now, so keep your eyes on the road," he said . . . Under his harshness, Gloria drooped like a flower.

It was blue dusk when they drove back into town. The street-lamps made golden pools in the wet streets.

Gloria drove the car into a dark and lonely side-street to let Wayburn out. A few days ago this precaution would never have occurred to her. But since May had been black-balled by the Home Women's Club Gloria was afraid of people and the things they might say . . . about her and Stan.

"Will you meet me day after to-morrow . . . same time and place?" Stan asked, opening the door of the machine.

Gloria shook her head.

"Can't," she said. "That's Thursday. I've promised May I'd go to the card-club meeting that day."

She longed to ask him why he couldn't meet her the next afternoon. But she hadn't the courage. . . . She had a miserable conviction that there was a woman mixed up in everything Stan did, every engagement he had.

"Search for the woman," and you often found Stan, at the same time!

CHAPTER XX

AND Thursday afternoon when Gloria went up the front walk to May's house, she was still wondering with whom Stan's engagement on Wednesday had been.

Sonya Chotek had left town. That eliminated her. Perhaps it had been Myra Gail whom Stan had seen!

A moment later Gloria was kissing Myra in May's big bedroom, as they took off their wraps.

"How are you, Myra?" she asked sweetly. "Didn't I see you downtown yesterday afternoon?"

"Not me," Myra shook her head. "I was out in the country driving all day."

Instantly Gloria was filled with wild jealousy. She was sure that Myra had been driving with Stanley Wayburn . . . just as sure as if she had seen them together!

Burning with anger, she went downstairs and found the table where she was to play. Lola Hough sat there, waiting. Lola, in her old foulard dress, was bright-eyed and excited. These card-club days were high spots in her dull life.

"We're partners," she said to Gloria. "Myra Gail and May are going to play here, too."

Gloria was sorry she had to start out the game with Lola for a partner. She was a very poor player, and nearly always spoiled her partner's chance for the prize.

Myra and May sat down at the table, presently. Gloria dealt the cards. She fairly slapped them down on the table as if they were live things to vent her spite upon!

The very first hand Lola lost her game.

Two red spots of color rose in Gloria's face. All her anger toward Stanley Wayburn and Myra gathered like a cyclone. In its path, Lola stood quite defenseless.

"You poor simp!" Gloria flamed at her, "to make a bid like that when you had a bust hand! You must be crazy! I should think you'd learn a few rules of the game, if you're going to even make a stab at playing bridge!"

All the color drained out of Lola's cheeks. If Gloria had slapped her face she couldn't have hurt her more. She put one hand on the table and rose. Every woman in the room was looking at her.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Perhaps I shouldn't play cards with people like you, who never forget that there's a prize at the end of the game. I don't play a professional game like yours!"

May came across the room.

"Please, girls, don't quarrel," she said, trying to push Lola down in her chair. "Do sit down, Lola, and go on with your game."

But Lola was firm.

"No," she said with a breaking voice, "I'm going. There's no use in my trying to keep up with you girls. . . . I don't have time to play often enough to keep my wits sharp. And I shouldn't have come to-day, at all. I left my ironing to come. . . ."

She went unsteadily upstairs to get her wraps.

"Well, let's get on with our game." Gloria broke the cold silence Lola had left behind her. "She really hasn't any business to be playing bridge, anyway. She's the worst player!"

Suddenly Myra got up, too.

"I think I'll go with Lola," she said quietly.

With utter dismay, Gloria watched Myra Gail get up from her table.

. . . It was one thing to quarrel with the shabby Lola, who had few friends—and quite another to have Myra for an enemy!

For Myra was a born leader. And the rest of the women were sure to side with Lola against Gloria if Myra did. Women were such sheep! They had no minds of their own!

In a flash Gloria was on her feet.

"Please don't go," she pleaded, laying one hand on Myra's arm. "I'll run upstairs and tell Lola I'm sorry for what I said. I'll bring her back."

She ran upstairs to May's bedroom where Lola was pinning on her unfashionable old hat.

"Please don't go, Lola," Gloria begged. "I'm awfully sorry for what I said to you just now. You know I didn't mean it. Please come on downstairs with me. Do!"

Lola shook her head.

"No," she said. "The things you said were too true, Gloria.

I haven't any business trying to play cards with the rest of you girls. You're all crackerjacks . . . and I guess I'm no good for anything but housework. Don't ask me to play any more to-day. . . . I couldn't face the bunch, downstairs."

At that moment Myra Gail came into the bedroom. She turned to Gloria, furiously.

"It's you who ought to be ashamed to face the crowd!" she cried, "after what you did to Lola! It was the meanest thing I've ever seen one girl do to another! Believe me, I'll think twice before I play cards with you again. . . . Come along, Lola, and I'll drive you home."

She marched past Gloria without another word or look. Lola followed meekly. Dazed, Gloria watched them go.

"Glo-ree!" May called her from the hall below. "Come on down so we can go on playing."

Gloria tossed her head and went down. No one greeted her as she came into the room. Gloria could feel the chill in the air.

She knew that the other girls were down on her because Myra was.

. . . Well, what did it matter? What did the friendship of women amount to, anyway? Gloria told herself she would have given up a dozen card parties for one drive with Stan Wayburn. . . . She wished she had gone riding with him this very afternoon!

She picked up her cards.

She was what May called a "mean" player. She played for the prize. She sat there now, tight-lipped and hard-eyed. She gathered in her tricks, intent as a kingfisher killing fish at a river's edge.

Gone was the Gloria of the limpid eyes, soft lips and babyish chin . . . the Gloria whom Dick loved.

"Well, Gloria Gregory's won the prize, as usual," little Mrs. Wing cried, when the scores were added up, two hours later.

"And it's one that will suit her to a T!" May added. She went into the dining-room, and returned carrying a dusty bottle of French brandy.

"What do you know about that for a slam! She gives me liquor and says it will suit me to a T!" Gloria shrilled. "What am I going to do with the stuff, girls? If I take it home to Dick, he'll put me out . . . he's so pure!"

"Don't take it home to Dick. Take it home and hide it.

You may need it some time, yourself, for a party," May advised.

But Gloria knew that she wouldn't dare to have another party soon in Dick's house. . . . Then, suddenly, she thought of Stan. She would give him the brandy! He liked a nip now and then.

Gloria telephoned him from the coat-closet under the stairs when she put on her wraps.

"Meet me outside Dick's office building in fifteen minutes," she said. "I'm driving downtown to bring him home, and I want to give you something, first."

Stan waited a moment before he answered.

"In front of your husband's office building?" he repeated. "That's not so good. What if he should look out of the window and see us?"

"Coward!" Gloria cried. "You should be willing to take a chance if I am!"

She hung up.

CHAPTER XXI

STANLEY was waiting on the edge of the curb when she drove up beside him.

"Get in a minute," she said. "I want to talk to you . . . or rather, I want to ask you something? Were you out driving with Myra Gail yesterday afternoon? . . . Now answer me, quick! Just like that! Yes, or no?"

Stan shook his head. But his cheeks were mantled with a dull red flush. Gloria was sure that he was not going to tell her the truth.

"Of course, I wasn't," he said. "Let's see, where was I yesterday afternoon? Nowhere in particular, I guess . . ."

He broke off and took her hands in their driving gloves in his. He smiled down into her clear, amber eyes.

"What a jealous little thing you are!" he said. "I wonder what you'd be like if you were married to me. Would you be jealous then?"

"Would I?" Gloria breathed. Stan's touch, even through her gloves, was comforting. "I'd camp on your trail. . . . I'd be so jealous! I wouldn't let another woman look at you or speak to you, even!"

"Do you feel that way about Dick?" Wayburn asked. He was vastly amused by her fury.

"No, I can't imagine being jealous of Dick, I wish I were," Gloria said.

She did honestly wish that she were jealous of Dick . . . that she cared for him wildly and longingly, as she was sure she loved Stanley Wayburn.

. . . It must be wonderful to marry the man you loved! To be not only his sweetheart, but his wife, his pal and his partner . . . to have all of him, his moods, his tempers, his worries, as well as his love!

To have the right to smooth away the tired lines around his eyes with your fingertips—to be a haven of rest and peace for him at the end of his long workday!

For Gloria could see that this was the way to be a wife, the kind of wife she had never been to Dick. Poor Dick! She had given him anything but rest and peace. . . .

"It's getting dark. I'm going to kiss you," Stan said abruptly.

But Gloria turned her head away from him.

"Here's what I wanted to give you," she said wanly. She handed him the bottle of brandy. "I won it playing cards."

"Some prize, I'll remark!" Stan said with enthusiasm.

He took her face between his hands and kissed her savagely, again and again.

"Don't!" Gloria cried. "You mustn't kiss me! We're forgetting I'm married!"

"Good Lord, how I want you!" he muttered in a thick voice. And then he was gone.

Gloria rubbed her bruised lips with her handkerchief.

. . . What did Stan mean when he said he wanted her? That he loved her? Surely, he must! . . . If he didn't, would he kiss her that way?

And with the memory of those kisses on her mouth, Gloria went up to Dick's offices.

In his private office Dick was dictating to Miss Briggs. The door stood open.

Gloria didn't go in at once. She tiptoed over to the mirror that hung above Miss Briggs' desk, and looked at herself in it. She wondered if Stan had mussed her hair or knocked her hat awry when he kissed her.

She powdered her little nose carefully and drew a moistened finger tip along her eyebrows.

Then, all at once Gloria became aware of Miss Briggs talking in a voice that was strangely loud for her.

"Please let me telephone for a taxicab to take you home!" she was pleading with Dick.

"No, no, my wife's coming down for me in her car," Dick answered shortly. His voice was muffled. "I'm just dizzy . . . be all right in a second."

Gloria went softly to the door between the two rooms, and looked into Dick's office.

He was bent forward over his desk, with his head on his folded arms. Beside him stood Miss Briggs.

One of her hands was almost on his shoulder. But she did not quite touch it.

Even as Gloria watched her, she drew it away and picked up a pencil. Then she backed away from Dick.

"Look here, Mr. Gregory," she said sharply, "it's none of my business, I suppose. But have you had a doctor? You know, you've had three of these spells in a month . . ."

Dick raised his head. His eyes were dark and circled with pain.

"Oh, don't keep talking, Susy," he groaned. "My head's thumping like a trip hammer. . . ." He dropped it into his hands again.

Susy! So that was what he called her when they were there alone, was it?—Gloria thought. Not even Susan . . . but Susy! The sedate Miss Briggs!

And she had all but patted Dick's shoulder, when she had hovered over him a moment ago! Was she in love with him . . . this "day-time wife" of his?

Probably she was, Gloria decided.

A tiny pin-prick of suspicion stabbed her. And then it was gone, almost before she felt it.

For Dick was a one-woman man, Gloria knew. And she was, for him, the One Woman!

Why worry about Miss Briggs, when Gloria was sure that Dick wouldn't have looked at a prize beauty when she, herself, was in sight?

Sometimes Gloria wished that he would look more often at other women. It would give her more freedom. . . .

She pushed the door wide open with her foot, and walked into the room.

The minute Dick saw her his face changed. His eyes lighted up and he grinned.

"Hello, old lady," he said.

Gloria did not so much as glance at Miss Briggs. She walked coolly past her into Dick's waiting arms. As he bent his lips down to hers, Gloria heard the secretary closing the door behind her. Secretly, she smiled.

She would show Miss Briggs how little any woman meant in Dick's life except herself, Gloria!

Some women might have to worry about their husband's stenographers, but not she! That was for unattractive women, middle-aged women . . . not for Gloria Gregory, with her face that was like a pansy!

And yet . . . Dick had called Miss Briggs "Susy" . . . in-

timately, almost as if she had been his wife! The memory was most disquieting to Gloria. While she was not actually jealous of Dick, she didn't want him to care the least little bit for anybody else . . . and especially for Miss Briggs, who perhaps loved him!

"Let's stay downtown for dinner," Gloria proposed suddenly. "It's so dull at home. And you and Miss Briggs have been working late. Why don't we ask her to have a bite with us?"

"Gosh, I'm pretty tired. I'd rather go home," Dick answered. "But . . . ask her if you want to."

Gloria danced out to Miss Briggs.

"We want you to come out to dinner with us. We're going to stay downtown," she said with the petulant sweetness of a spoiled child that will have its own way or know the reason why!

"Oh, I can't go—not in this old dress!" Miss Briggs replied, flushing. "And my face is dirty, too."

"Oh, fudge! You look lovely," Gloria insisted. She took Miss Briggs' coat and hat down from the hooks on the wall.

"You and I ought to have a chance to get acquainted," she went on with gay spitefulness. "We hardly know each other, and we really should be great friends. After all, we're both interested in the same man, aren't we?"

Miss Briggs didn't answer. She drew in her breath and gave Gloria a sharp, searching look. Her lips tightened as with pain.

Gloria returned her look with innocent eyes. But she had found out what she wanted to know in that second . . . that Miss Briggs was in love with Dick Gregory!

Dick came out of his office carrying his hat and overcoat.

"Ready?" he asked.

Gloria did not notice how sick he looked.

"I think so," she answered.

Miss Briggs lowered her eyes. With one hand she braced herself against her desk.

"It—it's just lovely of you and Mrs. Gregory to ask me to go to dinner with you," she said, "but I can't. I'm not dressed, for one thing. And I promised Mother we'd go to the movies to-night . . . and besides, you're too sick to go anywhere but home, Mr. Gregory."

She turned to Gloria with distress in her voice.

"Really, he's been sick all day," she said.

Dick looked at her gravely.

"I'm sorry you can't go," he said. "We both are. Perhaps you'll come with us some other time."

Miss Briggs gave him a wistful smile. Her blue eyes were troubled above the sudden flush in her cheeks.

It was then that Gloria saw that Miss Briggs had a certain beauty of her own. Not the beauty of coloring and features, but of inner warmth and radiance! . . . The beauty that, for lack of a better word, we call "charm."

After she had gone, Gloria turned furiously to Dick.

"You know, of course, why she wouldn't go to supper with us, don't you?" she asked. Her voice was accusing.

"She thinks I'm sick . . . that I ought to be home in bed," Dick answered simply.

"Oh, piffle!" Gloria sneered. "The woman's in love with you. And you know it! She wouldn't go because she can't bear to see us together. . . . It pretty nearly killed her a minute ago when you kissed me! I know! I saw her face! . . . She's jealous of me!"

"Cut out the movie stuff, Gloria," Dick said gruffly. "Miss Briggs has worked for me for years and years. She's all wrapped up in her job. It's her lover and her child . . . her whole life. She never gives me or any other man a thought!"

"Is zat so?" Gloria said babyishly. "I'm glad you think so. . . . Come on, let's go."

Late that night she lay in bed watching the tossing branches of the trees outside her window.

She was thinking of love . . . that maze where all of us wander and get lost, searching everywhere for the one person who was meant for us. . . .

She thought of Dick, who loved her. And of Miss Briggs, who loved Dick.

She wondered if Dick knew that his secretary cared for him. Gloria was sure he must know it. Why, any one could see it, from the very way that Miss Briggs looked at him, the tones of her voice when she spoke to him! . . .

Gloria raised herself on one elbow, and spoke into the darkness of the bedroom.

"Dick," she said, "why do you call Miss Briggs 'Susy' when you're alone with her, and 'Miss Briggs' when I'm around? . . . Dick, why do you?"

There was no answer. Dick was asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

THE next afternoon while Gloria was dressing to meet Wayburn and go riding with him, the telephone buzzed.

It was Stan himself.

"Our drive's called off," he said.

Gloria's heart, that had been soaring like a lark, sank.

"Why?" she asked. Was he going somewhere with Myra Gail?

"Because you're coming here instead," Stan answered. "To my li'l ol' family hotel. Suite 208. And hurry along!"

"Well, I like that!" Gloria said to herself indignantly, after she had hung up the receiver.

"Calls me up and tells me what I'm to do! What I'm not to do! Who does he think he is . . . the kaiser?"

The little family hotel where Wayburn lived was old and shabby.

There was a musty smell in the halls as Gloria walked through them to Stan's suite . . . a smell of dusty carpet, boiled cabbage and cheap perfume.

She tapped on the painted panels of his door. . . .

He opened it with a flourish.

"'Will you walk into my parlor, said the spider to the fly,'" he quoted. His voice was curiously thick.

"Stan, have you been drinking?" Gloria asked.

"You should ask! You who only last night presented me with the most wunnerful bottle o' brandy ever drunk!" he said cheerfully.

Her eyes searched the room. There were several bottles and a plate of dry, hard sandwiches on a table in the center of it.

"Been drowning all my troubles," Stan explained weakly.

"If you drank all that, you must have a million troubles," she answered.

Stan shook his head.

"Only one," he said. "Only one trouble in the whole wide world!"

Gloria was sure that he meant her . . . that she was the one thing that troubled him.

"And what is that?" she asked demurely. "What is your trouble, Stan?"

She gave him her hands and sat down beside the table with its bottles and glasses.

"Money!" Wayburn said unexpectedly. "Money!"

Gloria was silent.

"Here I am out of a job," the actor went on, dejectedly. "No prospect of getting another one, very soon! Fur overcoat in pawn! Watch in pawn! Landlady raising old Harry about not getting her rent. . . . I sure am in one tight place!"

He took his silver cigarette case from his pocket and held it out to her.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"No, thanks." Gloria shook her head. "But look here, Stan, let me lend you some money on this cigarette case! We're old friends, you and I."

Wayburn did not look at her while she took two \$10 bills . . . all the money she happened to have . . . from her bag and laid them under the sandwich plate on the table.

Then he put his cigarette case back into his coat pocket.

"Gloria," he said finally, "you shame me with your kindness."

Wayburn filled two glasses and gave one to Gloria.

"Here's how!" he said.

She did not look at him. Her eyes traveled slowly around the garish walls of Wayburn's sitting-room.

There were dozens of women's photographs on them . . . women who looked like actresses. Women who did not look like actresses. Pretty women. Women who smiled. Women who pouted adorably . . . All of them hateful to her, because they had cared for Wayburn!

And she, herself? Was she just one more pretty girl for Wayburn's collection?

Suddenly Gloria felt as if she were not in the room alone with Wayburn. She felt as if all of these women were there, too, looking at her . . . as Bluebeard's dead wives looked down at the living one who came to the Chamber of Horrors!

And she felt ashamed . . . ashamed of visiting Wayburn in his rooms! Secretly!

Love shouldn't be like this! Hidden, furtive, and ashamed!

Why, love should be like the sunrise!

She stood up.

"I'm going," she cried. And before the befuddled Wayburn knew what she was doing, she had slammed the door behind her and was gone.

She began to sob as she drove home through the early spring twilight.

She made up her mind never to see Stanley Wayburn again, so long as she lived! She would forget him! . . . Let some other woman have him . . . some one of the women whose faces plastered the walls of his room! How she hated and loathed those women!

Ranghild met her at the door of the house, with a frightened face.

"Mr. Gregory came home, sick, about an hour ago. His secretary brought him in a cab," she whispered.

Gloria ran upstairs.

Dick was stretched out on his bed, fully dressed.

His wife touched his closed eyelids and his forehead with her hand. They were burning hot.

His breath came in short, quick gasps.

"Dick!" Gloria cried. She was filled with a sudden fear.

Sickness had always terrified her. She had never forgotten one night in her early childhood, when her only brother had died a few hours after his birth. She could still remember her mother's terrible cries, heard through the thin walls of the little house. . . .

"Dick!" she called again. This time he moved, but he did not open his eyes.

In a panic she ran downstairs to the hall. Ranghild stood there wringing her hands in her apron.

"Now, don't get excited," Gloria said with a shaking voice. She was so excited herself that she could hardly take the telephone receiver from its hook.

She called to Dr. John, and asked him to come to Dick at once.

Then she turned to Ranghild with narrowed eyes.

"You said Miss Briggs brought Mr. Gregory home," she asked. "Did she help you get him upstairs, or did she leave right away?"

Gloria was furious with Miss Briggs for bringing Dick home.

He could have come alone in his taxi just as well as not! . . . But no, she must be a Ministering Angel to Dick! That was her pose, Gloria thought angrily.

. . . Why couldn't these secretaries realize that their jobs began and ended in the office? Gloria, herself, had never been interested in her employers when she had worked, except as employers. She was sure of that!

"Miss Briggs didn't come into the house," Ranghild said. "She paid the taxi driver, and went away. He and I got Mr. Gregory upstairs, and put him on his bed . . . Oh, ma'am, what do you think is the matter with him?"

Ranghild was almost in tears.

"Oh, nothing much, but the flu," Gloria answered. "He's had it twice this winter . . . and he gets right over it. He'll be all right in a day or two."

"I tried to telephone you all over town," the maid went on. "I phoned Mrs. Seymour, and Mrs. Gail, and Mrs. Hough, and Mr. Gregory's mother. . . ."

"Don't ever do it again!" Gloria cried sharply. "I'm usually down town shopping, so it's no use trying to get me by phone, anyway. . . . Let's go up and try to get Mr. Gregory into bed before the doctor comes."

They were unlacing Dick's shoes when Dr. John arrived.

Deftly as a nurse, he undressed Dick and put him into bed. He took out his stethoscope and listened to Dick's back and chest. Then he gravely nodded his head as he timed Dick's pulse.

"Just what I told him he'd have if he didn't take better care of himself," he remarked dryly. "It's pneumonia. I think I'd better telephone Mrs. O'Hara right away. She's the best pneumonia nurse in this town."

Gloria stood like a statue in the middle of the room. In a dream . . . a nightmare . . . she heard Dr. John call Mrs. O'Hara, and send a taxicab for her.

She listened to him ordering things from the drug store . . . camphorated oil, cotton, brandy.

And all at once, it was brought home to Gloria why it was that Dr. John couldn't go with May to all the parties and dances. . . . People needed him, as Dick needed him now! Their very lives depended on his not going to parties with his fun-loving wife . . . on his sticking to his job!

Gloria had never thought of it in just that way before. She

had always pitied May, because she was a doctor's wife. Well, she still pitied her, and yet—

"Now, then, Gloria, the best thing you can do is to move all your things out of this room! And I want you to stay out, yourself!" Dr. John said briskly.

Gloria gave a nervous little laugh.

"No need to ask me to stay out of this room," she said. "I'm frightened to death of sick people."

Her eyes were wide with fear.

"What makes him breathe like that?" she asked. She had been watching the quick rise and fall of Dick's chest under the bed clothes. He breathed as if he had been running a long way and was utterly exhausted.

"Fever and the disease, both," Dr. John said shortly.

Gloria gathered together her belongings . . . her clothes, her perfumes and powders, all the silver things from her dressing table . . . and took them into the guest room.

She stood looking out of the window. A taxicab was coming down the street. It slowed up before the house and stopped.

Gloria opened the door for the woman who descended from it and came up the walk toward the house.

The woman's face was vaguely familiar. And when she spoke, her voice was, too. Gloria was sure she had met her somewhere, before.

"How do you do? I'm Mrs. O'Hara," she said, as she came up the front steps. "I feel almost as if I know you, Mrs. Gregory. My sister, Sue Briggs, has worked for your husband for a good many years."

Miss Briggs' sister! This woman!

. . . That was why she had looked so familiar to Gloria! She had the same shadowy blue eyes and delicate features. Her voice was as low and sweet as Miss Briggs' own lovely voice.

"Will you go right upstairs?" Gloria asked with cold politeness. "Dr. Seymour is waiting for you."

Without another word, the nurse disappeared around the turn at the stair-landing.

Gloria went out into the bright kitchen. Ranghild, in her black dress, stood at the sink washing lettuce leaves in a colander.

"Will we have dinner at the usual time?" she asked chokily. Her eyes were red-rimmed.

Without warning she began to cry, covering her face with her wet, red hands. Gloria stared at her.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" she asked. "You've just got to get hold of yourself, Ranghild! Mr. Gregory's not dead, yet, you know!"

"Oh, I know that pneumonia! My man, he died of it five winters ago in Sweden . . ." Ranghild sobbed. She took a handkerchief from her apron pocket and wiped her swollen eyelids.

"That's how I happened to come to this country. I couldn't bear to stay at home without my Henrik. Everything made me think of him . . . the pine woods where we went for picnics, the light from the blast furnace where he worked. . . . Shall we have the potatoes baked or mashed for dinner, tonight, Mrs. Gregory?" Ranghild asked, with a mighty effort for self-control. She could see that Mrs. Gregory was not interested in her story.

"I didn't know you were a widow, Ranghild," Gloria said. "And bake the potatoes, please."

She went back into the living-room and picked up a fashion magazine.

CHAPTER XXIII

"MRS. GREGORY!" came Mrs. O'Hara's voice from the stairway.

Gloria went out into the hall.

The nurse had changed into her white uniform and cap. She was bending over the banisters.

"Your husband is calling for you," she said softly.

"I thought he was delirious. He didn't know anything a while ago," Gloria answered.

She did not want to go upstairs to Dick. She hated the thought of seeing him breathe in that terrible, hurrying way. It frightened her.

The look of his face had frightened her this afternoon . . . the skin flushed, the eyes bright with fever. No, she was not going to go upstairs and see him again, if there was any way out of it!

"Dr. Seymour told me to keep out of Mr. Gregory's room," she said to the nurse. "He made me take all my things out of it, even!"

Mrs. O'Hara smiled gently.

"Dr. Seymour is still upstairs. He told me to call you himself," she said.

With slow, reluctant feet Gloria went upstairs.

From behind the closed door of Dick's room she could hear a low moaning sound. It was not like Dick's voice. And yet it was his voice.

"Gloria," it said over and over.

With her hand on the knob of the door, Gloria turned and faced Mrs. O'Hara, who had followed her upstairs.

"I can't go in!" she protested again. "I simply can't! You don't know what you're asking of me . . ."

She darted across the hall and into the guest room, closing the door behind her.

She threw herself down on the blue silk cover of the bed, covered her ears with her hands to shut out the sound of Dick's

moaning. But she heard it, anyway. It went on and on in her brain . . . "Gloria . . . Gloria . . . Gloria . . ."

At last she got up and tapped on the door of the sick room. Mrs. O'Hara opened it at once.

Gloria tiptoed into the room.

The silk curtains had been taken down. A newspaper shrouded the rosy shade of the reading-lamp. A white towel had been laid on the top of her own dressing-table. And on it was a whole row of bottles. A hospital chart hung at the foot of Dick's bed.

And on it Dick lay, breathing in those short terrible gasps.

"Is he going to die?" Gloria whispered to Mrs. O'Hara.

Mrs. O'Hara studied Gloria with her serious eyes.

"How can I say?" she asked very gently. "He's a very sick man, Mrs. Gregory, but I've seen worse cases than his . . . Don't worry. Pray."

Gloria couldn't remember the last time she had prayed. It was so long ago. . . .

She had been so busy living life that she had forgotten all about the Giver of Life!

She went lightly to the side of Dick's bed, and took his hot, dry hand in hers.

At her touch Dick stirred. He half-opened his eyes.

"Rikky-Tikky-Tavy," she said, calling him the foolish little pet name that no one but herself ever used for him.

He closed his eyes.

A feeling of pity swept over Gloria. Dick seemed so alone in his pain—in his struggle to live.

Had she ever really given him any comradeship? Any happiness? She wondered.

Of course, she had . . . she told herself. She had been his wife. He had had her kisses, hadn't he? He had held her in his arms . . . and what else was there to love but love-making?

. . . Dimly, Gloria knew that there was something else in Dick's love for her. But what was it? Unselfishness, perhaps.

The sick man moved again. He was trying to say something.

Gloria bent her head to listen.

"Gloria," Dick moaned.

"Here I am," Gloria whispered. "Right here, Dick. Right here beside you . . ."

She stroked his forehead. He put up both his hands and thrust her away.

"I want Gloria," he moaned again. Gloria rose and turned away from the bed. Angrily she faced Mrs. O'Hara.

"He doesn't even know me," she said. "Now don't ask me to come in here again! Because I won't!"

Gloria went downstairs. She put on her hat and coat to go out of doors. She felt that, somehow, she must get away from the sound of Dick's voice moaning "Gloria . . . Gloria." It kept repeating itself over and over in her ears.

Gloria's impulse was always to escape the unpleasant things of life—poverty, hard work and sickness. She hated them with all her soul.

With a sigh of relief she opened the front door and went out.

Some one was coming up the walk. In the light that streamed out from the hall door Gloria could see that it was Mother Gregory. Her face was haggard with anxiety.

"What in the world has happened?" she asked, as she came up the front steps. "Maggie says Ranghild has been phoning for me. I've been at the church guild all afternoon, sewing."

"Dick's sick. Dr. John says that cold of his has developed into pneumonia," answered Gloria. She followed her mother-in-law back into the house.

Mother Gregory covered her face with her large capable hands, and began to cry.

"Oh, my dear God!" she sobbed. And the very voice of prayer was in her tone.

Gloria watched her in surprised silence. She wouldn't have believed there was any tenderness or softness in Mother Gregory. She had always thought that the love she had for Dick was the grim kind that a Spartan mother might have had for her son.

Presently Mother Gregory dried her eyes and started for the stairs.

Halfway to the first landing she stopped and turned.

"There's something I've been wanting to say to you, Gloria, and I may as well say it now," she said emphatically. "If Dick dies, remember, it's you who've killed him! He's been all run down from worry for weeks and weeks. Maggie's told me how you've worn him out with your rowdy parties and your late hours! And just the other day he had to come to his

father for money to pay for some of your folderols! . . . If you had any brains you'd know that worry kills more people than hard work ever does! . . . It's no wonder to me . . ."

Her voice broke again, and she went on upstairs.

Gloria slammed the door behind her and went outdoors.

Her heart was filled with hate and anger toward her mother-in-law.

She walked along the lamp-lit streets thinking of cruel cutting things she might have said to her, if she had only thought of them in time! How she wished she had!

The streets were very quiet. Scarcely any one passed. And as Gloria wandered along, a sort of peace stole over her.

There was a hint of spring in the air. The town, itself, seemed to be waiting for the caress of a divine hand that would waken buds on the trees and early crocuses in the brown earth.

Gloria suddenly wanted some one to whom she could go with her trouble—her misery.

Not her mother! . . . she had never confided in her mother.

Not May Seymour—nor Stanley Wayburn, either. They were fair-weather friends. There was no sympathy for any one in either of them. That was a cinch!

Then Gloria thought of Lola Hough, shabby, neglected Lola, whom she had hurt and insulted only yesterday.

Would Lola forgive her? Gloria knew she would.

And not only would she forgive her—she would probably have comfort and understanding for her, too . . . Lola was like that.

Trouble softened people and made them more human. And when it came to trouble, Lola certainly had more than her share. In fact, trouble was about all she did have!

Fifteen minutes later Gloria was ringing the bell of the old Hough homestead.

Lola, herself, came to the door.

She was covered with a big flannel bath apron. And under one arm she carried young Teddy Hough.

"Well, of all things; it's Gloria Gregory!" Lola cried. She smiled.

"I'm just on my way upstairs to put the babies to bed," she went on. "Come along, and then we can talk in peace."

Lola seemed to know that Gloria had come because she was in trouble, without being told.

Upstairs in the big front bedroom the twins, in nighties and red bathrobes, were having bread and milk for their supper.

Before the grate fire a bath basin was waiting for young Teddy. On the mantel shelf, his bottle of milk stood in readiness.

Gloria sank into an armchair covered with clean, faded cretonne. With somber eyes she watched Lola bathe her baby.

"Isn't he a little old kewpie?" Lola laughed, as she took him out of the tub and bundled him into his sleeping-bag.

In Gloria's opinion, Teddy was far too fat, but she didn't say so. She knew that, in Lola's eyes, her three babies were beautiful as cherubs.

Lola tucked them tenderly into their little beds and turned out the light.

"Good night, baby birds," she said, softly closing the door.

Gloria followed her silently downstairs to the dining-room.

A cold supper was laid there for one. Sliced corned beef, bread and butter, and a bowl of canned peaches.

Lola took an extra plate from the china closet.

"Stay and have a bite of supper with a lonesome woman," she begged. "And while I'm boiling the water for the tea, you can tell me what's on your mind. I can see that something's bothering you."

"Something? . . . Everything!" Gloria cried. "My whole life's wrong from start to finish, and I'm just beginning to find it out. . . . Lola, I'm married to a man I don't love."

Lola stared at her with wide-eyed astonishment.

"You don't care for Dick?" she asked incredulously. "Why, you must be crazy, Gloria! Dick's the very nicest man I know. . . ."

Gloria interrupted her with a harsh laugh.

"And not only that," she said, "but the man I do care about doesn't give a snap of his fingers for me!"

"Who's the man? Any one I know?" Lola asked curiously.

"Yes, you know him. But I'm not going to say who he is," Gloria answered, stubbornly, "so don't ask me!"

Lola was silent. She measured tea into the little brown pot on the table. Her eyes were thoughtful.

"Oh, I see!" she exclaimed presently.

"What do you see?" Gloria asked.

"I see why you come to me with this story," Lola said. "I

wondered why you'd picked me. . . . It's Bill you're in love with, isn't it?"

Gloria threw back her head and laughed wildly. That Lola should think she was in love with Bill Hough was too funny! . . . Couldn't she see that he was fat and middle-aged, and had puffs under his eyes?

. . . But that was the way with women who loved their husbands. They thought everybody else was in love with them, too!

"Bill? Not in a million years!" Gloria answered soberly. "No, the reason I told you about myself, Lola, is because you have more sense than the rest of the girls I know. And you won't blab it all over, either. . . . And I just had to tell somebody! What would you do if you were I?"

Lola pondered.

"Well," she said at last, "if I were you, I'd go right home and tell Dick about it. That's the only square thing for you to do, so far as I can see."

Slowly Gloria shook her lovely head. Her eyebrows straightened into a frown.

"Of course, I can't do that, with Dick so sick," she mused. "But when he's better, I think I will tell him—that is, if he gets better."

Lola set her cup down with a clatter.

"Do you mean to say Dick's sick?" she asked. She couldn't believe her ears.

"I forgot to tell you. He's down with pneumonia," Gloria answered. "That's why I had to get out of the house. . . . There's a nurse there, and Mother Gregory, besides. And the whole place sounds and smells like a hospital. Oh, it's awful!"

Lola gasped. For a minute she was speechless.

"Well, my advice to you is to get home as soon as you can!" she cried, when she had found her voice. "The idea of leaving a sick husband! Suppose Dick wants you and you aren't there? . . . For goodness' sake, Gloria, don't sit there! You've got to go home right away!"

Dully, Gloria rose to her feet.

"I suppose I must," she sighed drearily. "But, gosh, how I hate to go back there!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE next ten days were a nightmare to Gloria.

Dick hovered between life and death. Sometimes he called for her in his delirium. Sometimes it was his mother he wanted.

Mother Gregory came every morning and sat in the sun-room, knitting or reading her Bible.

At meals, she and Mrs. O'Hara told each other all their best stories about operations and unusual diseases. Gloria shivered through these meals.

One sunshiny afternoon she made up her mind to ask May Seymour to go for a walk with her. She went out into the hall and picked up the telephone to give May's number.

Mrs. O'Hara was talking on the extension, up in Dick's room. Gloria listened intently.

"He'll get well if his heart holds out. But it's pretty weak," she heard Mrs. O'Hara say.

Then another voice answered her.

"Well, I'm at his office. Phone me if anything happens," it said. It was Miss Briggs' voice! She and her sister were talking about Dick!

Gloria held her breath and listened. Her ear was pressed tight to the receiver.

Then Miss Briggs' voice came over the phone again. This time it was choky with tears.

"Tell me the truth . . . is Mr. Gregory going to die?" she asked brokenly.

"I don't think so. The crisis is past," Mrs. O'Hara answered, "but these heart complications are tricky things."

"How does that wife of his take it?" Miss Briggs asked.

Gloria frowned. What right had these two women to be talking about her and Dick in this way?

"Oh, don't ask me to figure Mrs. Gregory out! She's too deep for me!" she heard Mrs. O'Hara say. "She never comes near her husband's room . . . but I can't get her to stir out

of the house. I'll say this for her, though: She's the prettiest thing I ever saw."

Miss Briggs sniffed.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

Stealthily Gloria hung up the receiver. She stood biting the pointed ends of her fingernails, thoughtfully.

Of course, Miss Briggs couldn't see that she was pretty! She was too jealous of her! She hated her because she was Dick's wife!

. . . Why couldn't Miss Briggs see that it was her own fault that she hadn't been able to "land" Dick?

Gloria was sure that any woman could marry any man she chose to marry. . . . All she had to do was to "vamp" him intelligently.

These women like Miss Briggs, who scorned a bit of honest make-up and a curling iron! What conceited simps they were!

No man was going to take the time to look past their colorless faces to find their beautiful souls. Not on your life!

And Miss Briggs, with all her brains, hadn't had sense enough to see that, Gloria decided.

She ran upstairs to her own room that had been the "spare" bedroom until Dick's illness.

As Mother Gregory had privately remarked to Maggie. . . . "Anybody with a nose would know it was Gloria's room!" For it was fragrant with the smell of Gloria's favorite perfume and powder. The bed was heaped with tiny slumber-pillows, and an untidy pile of motion picture magazines littered the window seat.

It had always been the dream of Gloria's life to break into the movies . . . or to go on the stage. The thought still lurked in the back of her mind, teasingly.

She leaned over the dresser and held her face close to the mirror, so that the coppery sunshine of her hair brushed the glass.

. . . How could Miss Briggs say she wasn't pretty? Why, she was beautiful!

Dick had always said so. So had—Stan Wayburn.

Stan Wayburn!

The very thought of him was like sudden light to Gloria. Ten days ago she had made up her mind never to see him again. She had kept her mind on home and poor Dick. She had seen no one but the nurse, the doctor, and Mother Greg-

ory. . . . And oh, but she was sick and tired of the four walls of the house! She needed cheering up, she told herself.

In a flash, Gloria's mind was made up.

She would see Stan Wayburn that very afternoon! She would call him up and ask him to take a walk with her. Surely there could be no harm in that.

Then, after that, she would never see him again—perhaps.

. . . Gloria dressed to go out, with feverish haste.

When she was ready, she tried to slip quietly out of the house without letting Mother Gregory know she was going.

But Mother Gregory had X-ray eyes and the ears of a fox.

"Where are you going, Gloria?" she called. "I want you to get some darning cotton for me at the store, if you're going out."

"Oh, the dickens!" Gloria remarked to herself. She didn't want Mother Gregory to see how she had dressed herself to go out to meet Stanley Wayburn. But there was no way out of it.

She dragged herself unwillingly into the sunroom. Mother Gregory had been darning Dick's socks and sewing buttons on his shirts, all day.

"Gloria," she asked now, "don't you ever do any mending for Dick?"

Gloria shook her head impudently.

"I don't know how to mend. My mother always kept my clothes in order for me," she said. "Now when my stockings have holes in them, I throw them away. . . . I hate darned stockings."

Mother Gregory set her lips firmly.

"I've always said," she remarked, rolling a pair of socks into a neat ball, "that a lazy wife could throw more money into the rag bag and the garbage can than her husband could earn working night and day."

"I'm no worse than the rest of the women I know," Gloria defended herself.

"Then you know the wrong kind of women—you flapper wives aren't real wives!" replied Mother Gregory. She picked up the Bible that lay on the wicker table beside her. She opened it, and put on her glasses.

"Let me read you something," she said. "Listen to this . . . 'Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth trust her. She

will do him good and not evil. . . . She seeketh wool and flax and worketh willingly with her hands.' ”

Gloria laughed.

“That’s the bunk . . . that old stuff. Times have changed since the Bible was written,” she said.

“That’s where you’re wrong, Gloria. Times haven’t changed. They’re just the same as they were in the days of King Solomon,” Mother Gregory went on, “and it looks to me as if a virtuous woman is just as hard to find these days as she was thousands of years ago. . . . Where are you going all dressed up and covered with that nasty perfume you use?”

Gloria began to feel that in some uncanny way Mother Gregory knew that she was going out to telephone Stanley Wayburn to meet her.

“Is it tan darning cotton you wanted?” she evaded. “Like this?” She bent to pick up a little piece that lay on the rug at Mother Gregory’s feet.

Suddenly she felt Mother Gregory’s hands on her shoulders. She looked up at her. The older woman’s eyes were bright with tears.

“My dear,” she said, “I talk to you this way only because I want this marriage of yours and Dick’s to be a success. . . . Let us try to be friends, you and I.”

Gloria found herself facing the most surprising fact in human experience . . . the kindness of a person you believe to be thoroughly unkind!

She couldn’t find a word to say. Finally she rose to her feet, and put the scrap of darning cotton into her purse. She went slowly out of the house into the sunny street.

She telephoned Stan from the store where she bought the darning cotton.

“Zowie, but it’s good to see you again,” he said when she met him. “Didn’t you come in your automobile?”

Gloria shook her head. Her eyes shone with welcome.

“No. I’m dying to walk, if you don’t mind a little hike,” she said. “I’ve been penned up in the house ever since I saw you last. Dick’s had pneumonia, but he’s better now. . . . I guess he’ll be all right if his heart holds out.”

“Is that so? Sorry to hear he’s been sick,” Stan answered indifferently as they swung along.

Then his tone changed.

“That explains why I haven’t heard from you for so long,”

he said. "Now tell me . . . why, under heaven, did you suddenly get up and beat it that day you came to see me at the hotel? I never was so surprised in my life. What made you do it?"

Gloria blushed uncomfortably.

"Oh, I hate to tell you," she answered in a low tone. "It was because of all those women's pictures in your room! I'm so jealous of every woman you've ever cared about! . . . And I hated to think I was just one of them. I made up my mind that day that I'd never have a thing to do with you again!"

Wayburn laughed. Then he turned slightly and tipped his hat to some one who passed.

"That was your friend, Mrs. Wing . . . the dizzy blond I met at your party," he said.

"Is that so!" Gloria exclaimed. "I suppose by to-morrow she'll have it all over town that I'm in love with Stanley Wayburn, the well-known actor!"

Stan grinned. "Are you?" he asked.

"I wish I knew. One day I hate you . . . and the next day I can't wait to see you," the girl confessed. "But I think about you most of the time. If that's being in love, I suppose I am."

Gloria walked along, deep in thought.

She wondered what it was she felt for Dick. It was true that life with him was not exciting. And yet, she had said a prayer of thankfulness the night he had passed his pneumonia crisis.

She had been filled with sorrow, that night, at the thought that Dick might die and leave her.

But now that he was better, she was almost indifferent, again. . . .

What ailed her, anyway, Gloria wondered. Why didn't she know her own mind?

When she had married Dick she had been almost happy with him. But a bottomless pit had opened between them, with the return of Wayburn into her life.

Gloria looked at Stan. With his hands in his pockets, he sauntered along humming a jazzy little tune.

Stan was almost always cheerful, full of pep, ready for a good time. The wilder the time the better it suited Stan! . . . He cheered Gloria up like a jazz band.

"You're a great little worrier, Russet," he said now, showing his white teeth in a grin. "Why can't you make up your

mind that you and I enjoy being together . . . and let it go at that? Why must you worry yourself about the other women I know? . . . You know I think you're the 'some baby' of all the world, don't you? Isn't that enough?"

He took her hand in his and pressed it tight, for a moment. Then let it drop.

"Perhaps you do think that. But you don't love me," Gloria cried. "You don't love me enough! When a man has cared for a girl the way Dick has for me, she can never be fooled by imitation love again. She knows the real thing . . ."

"Tragedy queen!" Stan said, with a mocking light in his eyes.

Gloria stamped her foot. Why couldn't he take her seriously once in a while?

Gloria and Wayburn walked on in silence for a few minutes.

Then Wayburn spoke again. "Look here, Russet! What do you want to bother with me for any longer?" he asked. "You quarrel with me all the time we're together, anyway. It doesn't make you happy to be with me any more, does it?"

Gloria frowned thoughtfully.

"It makes me awfully unhappy not to be with you," she said simply. "And, Stan, I don't quarrel with you."

"You nag me about other women, though," Wayburn said, "and I don't deserve it. I'm no sheik."

Gloria brightened.

"You do like me, don't you?" she asked, comforted.

Wayburn nodded. "And there's something else I want to say to you, Russet. . . . You know, I have a hunch that you care for this husband of yours a lot more than you think you do. What you hate is married life—being tied down. Isn't that so?" he asked.

Gloria stopped dead. She turned to Wayburn in a blaze of anger.

"So that's it! You're tired of me!" she declared. "You want to kid me into thinking I'm crazy about Dick, so I won't bother you any more, don't you? . . . Well, maybe I am crazy about him! . . . But you, you oil can! I'll bet you have some new girl on your string this minute . . . some cheap Sonya Chotek or other!"

A wild passion of shame and self-disgust swept over her. She turned to run away from Wayburn. But he caught her by one arm and drew her to his side with a strong steady pull.

"You young wild cat!" he laughed. "Who could be tired of you?"

But Gloria was not to be soothed. She jerked herself from Wayburn, and dashed furiously down the street.

A minute later she was sorry she had lost her temper.

She violently wished that Stan would call her back, or come after her. But he did not.

She walked on toward the center of the town with her head held high. Hot tears stung her eyeballs. But she blinked them away.

The sun had set. And the chill of early evening crept into the still air.

Gloria went into a drug-store and bought a theatrical magazine. She read it, sitting on a high stool, as she slowly sipped a chocolate malted milk.

On the cover was a picture of Kit Cameron, a hometown girl, who had become a Broadway chorus girl.

Gloria knew Kit Cameron. She and Kit had gone to business college together four years ago.

"And here she is on Broadway!" Gloria said to herself, "and I'm still here in the same old rut, wondering what it's all about!"

She looked longingly at Kit's picture, wishing her own were in its place. Then she raised her eyes to the mirror at the back of the soda fountain.

Her own reflection smiled back at her, adorably.

"Why, I'm twice as good looking as Kit!" she told herself. "I'll bet I could land a job on Broadway in fifteen minutes, if I half tried!"

The thought was comforting to her wounded vanity. She felt much better as she left the drug-store and stepped out into the darkness. She walked home, trying hard not to think of Stanley Wayburn.

When she got home, Mrs. O'Hara was playing solitaire in the living-room. She looked up as Gloria came in.

"Ranghild left your supper in the warmer for you," she said.

"I don't want it. I just had a malted milk, and I'm so afraid of getting fat," Gloria answered. "How's Dick to-night?"

"He seems a little better. Wouldn't you like to stop in a minute to see him? He's awake," said Mrs. O'Hara in her sweet voice, that was so like Miss Briggs' lovely accents.

"I think I will," the girl answered. She went upstairs and took off her wraps. With unfailing coquetry, she powdered her nose and fluffed up her hair before she went across the hall to see Dick.

He was lying in bed, perfectly still. Only his eyes moved. They turned to look at her as she came into the room. They lighted up as she came nearer. His lips moved. But he was too weak to speak.

Gloria sat down on the edge of the bed. She took one of Dick's hands in both of hers. Her heart ached with pity for him.

She leaned over and kissed him on the forehead, much as a mother might have kissed her sick child. Dick closed his eyes contentedly. That was what he had wanted.

In a few minutes he was asleep.

On the table beside Dick's bed was a jar of heavy roses that were beginning to wilt.

As Gloria looked at them a petal fell from one of them. Then another and another dropped down upon the polished wood of the table.

. . . Life was like that. One by one the petals fell from it, leaving it bare. First youth went. Then love . . . and happiness.

At that moment Gloria was sure that life was a sad thing. She got up and tiptoed out of Dick's room. She threw herself down on her own bed and cried as if her heart would break because she had lost Stan Wayburn. . . .

Had she ever had him, she wondered. Had he ever honestly cared for her?

Really, hadn't she, herself, pursued Stan? In her heart of hearts, Gloria knew that she had. . . .

Well, she had learned her lesson! She would never telephone him again, or meet him again, anywhere! . . . She would not even speak to him if she met him on the street!

CHAPTER XXV

DICK's recovery was very slow. The town was gold and green with April before he was allowed to sit up in his chair beside the window.

At first he was contented to just sit and watch life and movement in the street below him.

But as he grew stronger he called for books. So Mother Gregory and Mrs. O'Hara took turns reading aloud to him.

One afternoon when Gloria was passing his door he called to her.

"Will you see if you can find Stevenson's 'Treasure Island' for me in the book-cases downstairs?" he asked. Gloria brought it.

"This," he said to her, "is the greatest book for boys that was ever written. Wait until I have a kid of my own to read it to. . . ."

He broke off, and looked thoughtfully at his wife.

His response to her beauty quickened every day. He would find something new—a wave in her red-gold hair or the long line of her neck—that made an exquisite discovery.

He put out a hand now, and closed it around her wrist.

"You're like a little flame," Dick told her. "They said something when they named you 'Gloria.' You are a glory!"

Gloria moved away from him.

She was thankful when the telephone rang, at that moment.

"Hello, Russet!" It was Stanley Wayburn's voice.

"Hello," Gloria cried, trying to keep her sudden gladness out of her own.

"I'm homesick to see you," Stan said frankly. "And I have a fine bit of news for you, too. If I promise to hide all the pictures of my old sweethearts, will you come over to see me this afternoon?"

Gloria hesitated.

"Come on . . . be a sport and say 'Yes,' " Stan urged.

"All right, I will," Gloria answered.

She hated herself for yielding.

But her longing to see Wayburn swept everything else from her mind. . . .

He greeted her jauntily. He tried to put his arms around her, as he helped her off with her coat. But she slipped out of them.

"What's your wonderful news?" Gloria asked. She took refuge in a dignity that was new to her.

"Nothing except that I think I've landed a job in New York," he said carelessly, dropping into a chair opposite her.

Gloria felt as if he had dropped a bomb-shell at her feet.

"Well, of all things!" she cried. "In New York!"

This was the end, then! Stan's luck had changed.

He would have his chance on Broadway. And, of course, he would make a hit. And she would never see him again . . . except from across the footlights.

"Oh, I can't bear it. . . . I can't bear it!" she cried, suddenly bursting into tears. She put her head down on the arm of her chair and sobbed. Her heart seemed to be breaking.

Stan came over to her, and lifted her head. He looked into her tear-stained face.

"I haven't gone yet," he said. "There's many a slip 'twixt the man and his job, you know! . . . But you do love me a little, don't you, Russet?"

He looked down at her intently.

"Do you know you're an awfully sweet little kid?" he murmured into her hair.

Gloria couldn't speak. There was nothing in the world for her at that moment but the sound of Stan's voice, the blue of his eyes that looked down into hers, and his arms that held her. . . . These, and the aching thought that soon he would be gone away from her.

"You do care for me a little," he repeated. He kissed her long and clingingly upon her heavy lips.

Gloria didn't resist him. She seemed to be under a spell, an enchantment. Her head drooped like a flower that is too heavy for its stalk. Her eyes fastened themselves on Stan's hand where it grasped her arm so tightly that it had whitened along the knuckles.

Suddenly she noticed that the sleeve of his gray coat was shiny and frayed along the cuff. She gave a little gasp of pity.

Wayburn's eyes followed hers to the frayed sleeve.

He freed her, and stood looking at it with a rueful smile.

"I have a suit for every occasion, and this is it!" he said lightly.

Gloria laughed.

The spell that held her was broken.

"It's getting late," she said. "I must go."

Wayburn gripped her by both wrists.

Gloria pulled herself away from him and she put on her hat. From under its wide brim she looked at Wayburn with distress in her eyes.

"It was dreadful of me to let you know I noticed your raggedy sleeve, Stan," she said, finally. "But so long as I have . . ."

She bit her lip in embarrassment.

"Well, go on. What were you going to say?" Wayburn asked impatiently.

"Only this . . . you can't go down to New York in that old suit. You've got to have some new clothes," Gloria answered. "The more prosperous you look the better job you'll land."

"Nobody knows that any better than I do!" Wayburn said harshly. "But new clothes don't grow on bushes, Russet. If they did, I'd have picked off a couple of new suits weeks ago, believe me!"

"If I were a man friend of yours, you'd let me lend you some money, wouldn't you?" Gloria asked.

Wayburn nodded.

"Well, think of me just as a friend . . . not a woman, then," Gloria went on. "If I could get hold of some money somewhere, to help you out, would you take it?"

"No, it would be out of the question," Wayburn answered. "No decent man ever borrows from a woman."

Gloria suddenly remembered the day at the tea-house, when Stan had borrowed five dollars from her, and forgotten to pay it back. She remembered the two ten-dollar bills she had left in this very room a few week before, for him. And she hated herself for remembering.

"If you'd promise to let me pay it back with interest, I might consider borrowing a little money from you," Wayburn surprised her, "just to tide me over until I get my job in New York. . . ."

Gloria nodded.

"All right, Stan," she said. "I'll get it for you." And so the matter was settled.

For the next week Gloria racked her brain, wondering how she was going to get hold of at least \$200 for Stanley Wayburn.

She looked at her engagement ring, her wrist watch, and the little platinum bracelet Dick had given her for Christmas. She wondered how much they would bring if she pawned them.

And besides, she hated the thought of giving up her jewelry.

There must be some other way she could get the money.

She was wondering about it one afternoon, as she sat beside Dick.

"A penny for your thoughts, Gloria," he said suddenly. He sat up in bed, and the book that he had been reading tumbled to the floor.

Gloria bent to pick it up. She laid it on the counterpane.

Instantly Dick's arms were around her.

Gloria wrenched herself out of them, and stood up.

"Don't do that!" she cried sharply. "Let me alone!"

The look of tenderness that had been in Dick's eyes was blotted out. Gloria knew that she had cut him to the heart when she had snatched herself away from him. But she didn't care.

"Can't I kiss you any more, Gloria?" Dick asked. "After all, you're my wife, you know."

"Yes, but I belong to myself first!" Gloria answered. "And I don't want to be kissed right this minute, as it happens."

The minute she had said it she was sorry.

. . . How could she have been so brutal to Dick when he was still so weak and sick? It was not his fault that she had married him without being sure of herself. His only crime had been that he loved her too well.

"Don't mind what I say, to-day. I'm in a fiendish mood, I guess," she said.

She was. She was in a frenzy of worry . . . wondering how to get the money for Stanley Wayburn.

"I'm sorry I was cross, Dick," she said softly.

But the gentleness in her voice only fanned the slow anger in Dick to sudden flame.

"There's something behind all this coldness of yours. I'm not blind!" he flared up. "You can't make a fool of me! . . . How about this guy, Wayburn? You still see him, don't you?"

Gloria gasped. At times like this life with Dick was not lacking in adventure!

And Gloria, like all women, thrilled to adventure. She knew how to meet it. It was the breath of life to her!

Moreover, Dick as the Male Proper, in a jealous mood, was much easier to deal with than Dick the Model Husband. Gloria understood him. . . . She had learned all about jealousy from Stanley Wayburn.

She went over to Dick and laid her small hand against his mouth.

"Hush!" she said. "You mustn't get excited like this. You'll make yourself sick! . . . And you know that what you're saying is crazy nonsense, anyway!"

Dick's senses ached with the longing to take her in his arms. The warm nearness of her made his head go round. But he clenched his hands at his sides, until the nails bit into his palms.

"I'm tired," he said. "I think I'll go to sleep for a while. Perhaps you'd better go."

And to his relief, Gloria went. Dick heard the door of her room close, and the bolt slide into place.

CHAPTER XXVI

THAT night Gloria sat for a long time before her mirror.

"How long am I going on like this?" she asked her own face, as it glimmered at her from the silver depths of the looking-glass.

She couldn't go on being Dick's wife! Not while she felt as she did about Stanley Wayburn, at any rate. That much was certain.

She found herself facing a problem that women have faced since this world began.

She was chained to one man. And she was sure she loved another!

What was she going to do about it? Wasn't there some way out of it? There must be!

She knew Dick would never let her go without a struggle.

Of course, she could always go back to work.

But she shuddered at the thought of getting up at seven every morning, of gulping down a cup of coffee, and dashing downtown to hammer her fingers off on a typewriter all day.

Ugh, she had had enough of that! It was worse than housework.

That wasn't what she wanted to do. Not by a long chalk!

There was a verse pasted on her mirror. Gloria raised her eyes to read it, although she knew it by heart:

"Life is but once,
Drink the cup,
Wear the roses,
Live the verses."

That was Gloria's creed. She believed in getting all the happiness there was . . . to the last drop! She simply was not going to be harnessed to hard work and dullness if there was any way out!

She wanted laughter, dancing, music—the jazz of life. In her mind, Stanley Wayburn stood for those things.

When she thought of Dick she thought of meals to be cooked, socks to be darned, bills to be paid, long dull evenings by the living-room fire. He stood for Marriage.

. . . And Gloria was sick and tired of married life.

"If I'd only known what it was like, I'll bet a hat I'd still be single!" she said to her face in the glass. It looked back at her with brilliant, unhappy eyes.

Gloria was struck again with the fact of her own good looks.

Why, she didn't need any man! Not Dick, or Stan Wayburn, either! . . . Her face was her fortune!

Why should she be a household drudge, or an office hack, either? With a face like hers?

She could carve out a future for herself . . . Just as Kit Cameron had! On Broadway. That street of stars!

Gloria snapped out her light and went to bed.

Against the darkness of her room she seemed to see her name in electric lights above the doors of a theater . . . "Gloria Gordon Gregory."

Yes, if worse came to worst, she could go on the stage to earn her own living! . . . Kit was in New York. She could show her the ropes!

Gloria smiled as she closed her eyes and dropped off to sleep.

The next morning Dick was not so well.

"Something seems to have upset him. He'd better stay in bed all day and rest," Mrs. O'Hara said to Gloria at breakfast. "This is the day I have my afternoon off duty, too. So perhaps you'd better sit with him this afternoon, Mrs. Gregory."

Gloria had come downstairs hatted to go out. She drained her coffee cup and stood up.

"All right, I'll be home early," she answered. "I'm just going to run over to Mrs. Seymour's for a little while."

She found May having breakfast at one end of the dining-room table. The morning paper was propped against the coffee pot and a half-smoked cigarette was burning itself away at the edge of her plate.

"Have a cup of coffee?" May asked.

"No, thanks, I've just had breakfast," Gloria replied.

She came to the point at once.

"May, you don't happen to have any money knocking around

that you want to lend to a friend in need, do you?" she asked bluntly.

May shook her head in a puzzled sort of way.

"Heavens, no. I haven't one sou to lend anybody," she said. "I've just been wondering when they're going to throw me into jail for debt. . . . What do you need money for?"

Gloria flushed. She bit off a hangnail, nervously, before she answered. She wondered if May divined that she wanted the money for Wayburn.

"What does anybody need money for?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders.

May sat looking at her with narrowed eyes.

"Give me the low-down on this," she said at last. "If you just wanted this money for clothes you'd ask Dick for it, I know. What mischief have you been up to? . . ."

She broke off suddenly. Gloria's face was red with anger.

"Well, you're a fine friend!" she cried. "I lower my pride to ask you for a loan. And all you can do is to pry into my affairs, instead of lending me a little. You make me sick, May!"

That afternoon when Gloria went into Dick's room to sit with him, he held a letter out to her.

"Would you mind running down to the corner to mail this for me?" he asked.

Gloria looked at the letter. It was addressed in Dick's fine dashing hand to "Miss Susan Briggs."

Gloria went into her own room after her wraps to go out and mail Dick's letter.

The day was cold and there was a tiny jet of steam hissing out from the radiator beside her dressing table.

It gave Gloria a sudden idea.

She picked up the envelope and held it against the little jet of steam. The edges of the gummed flap began to curl slowly. . . . She would just open that letter and read what was in it!

She would find out what Dick was writing to Miss Briggs about! He had no business to be writing to her anyway.

Didn't Miss Briggs telephone him every morning from the office to tell him how things were going there? If he had anything important to say to her, why didn't he say it then in-

stead of putting it into a letter, for goodness' sake? . . . Unless it was something that he didn't want any one to hear. Ah, that must be it! . . .

Gloria picked up her nail file from her tray of toilet things. She slipped its sharp point under the loosened flap of the envelope.

Then she stood still, looking down at the sedate syllables of Susan Briggs' name.

She was filled with sudden self-disgust.

What a sneaking thing she was doing! Opening another person's letter!

Gloria flung the envelope down on her dresser as if it had been a live coal. She pressed the flap down tight.

Then she snatched it up and went back into Dick's bedroom.

"Looky here, Rikky," she began. "Do you think it's fair of you to write a letter to Miss Briggs and ask me to mail it for you? Particularly when you give it to me all sealed up for fear I might take a peek at it. . . . Here it is! I'm not going to post it for you!"

She tossed it down onto the covers of Dick's bed.

"As if I care a snap of my fingers what you've written to your old Miss Briggs!" she added scornfully. "You flatter yourself!"

Dick threw back his head and laughed.

"By Jove, I believe you do care, at that!" he said. "I believe you do!" The thought that she might be jealous of Miss Briggs seemed to please him immensely.

He ripped open the envelope.

"Here's the letter I wrote to her, Gloria," he said. "Want to see it?"

Gloria took the two sheets of paper that he handed to her.

One was a bill for a hat that Gloria had bought two or three weeks before on one of her shopping trips with May. The other sheet was a note to Miss Briggs.

Gloria read it with frank curiosity.

"Dear Miss Briggs," it ran. "This bill is okeh. Will you please send a check with it? Sincerely yours,

"RICHARD GREGORY."

Gloria looked at it dumbly.

"What did you think I was writing to Miss Briggs? A love

letter?" Dick asked good-naturedly. "Did you think I was having an affair of the soul with her?"

His wife nodded and hung her head.

"I'm afraid I did," she said in a shamed undertone.

Dick took her hand and held it in one of his.

"Well, you need never be afraid of that sort of thing," he answered her. "I'll never cheat, Gloria. No matter what I do, I'll be honest with you. If ever I find a woman I care for more than I care for you, I'll tell you all about it . . . even before I tell her!"

Gloria looked at him thoughtfully with her wide, brown eyes.

"You don't suppose you ever will care for anybody but me, do you?" she asked, startled.

She was surprised to feel the surge of jealousy that swept through her at the thought of Dick ever falling in love with any other woman.

"Not a chance in the world," Dick answered. "You know I'll never care a rap about anybody but you. But I'm just telling you that you needn't worry about letters I write to Miss Briggs or any other woman living, so that you won't worry. See?"

Gloria couldn't answer him. A lump rose in her throat.

Dick was so honest. So decent. He was too good for her!

What would he say if he knew that she had let Stanley Wayburn make love to her? She raised a pointed finger and rubbed it hard across her lips. She felt as though they were soiled by Stan's kisses.

She made a little movement with her hands almost as if she were wringing them. She was terribly afraid she was going to cry. And she turned away and looked out of the window so that Dick shouldn't see her face. . . .

"I'll never cheat," he had said to her. What an ugly word "cheat" was!

Gloria saw now that she ought to have told Dick how she felt about Stanley Wayburn from the moment when he had kissed her in his dressing-room. That would have been the square thing to do!

But the whole affair had happened so gradually . . . that she hadn't realized that it had completely separated her from Dick until it was too late.

But was it too late, after all, to put Wayburn out of her life? Couldn't she forget him and try to be a good wife to Dick?

. . . After all, what were a few kisses, a few automobile rides with Wayburn? There had been no real harm in them—and Stan was going away soon.

Gloria stared out into the street, thinly veiled by gray April rain.

"I'll try to get that money and give it to Stan and then I'll never see him again. . . . I'll never think of him again!" she said defiantly. It was as if she disputed something with herself.

She put her handkerchief up to her eyes and brushed the welling tears away.

. . . The telephone buzzed loudly in the quiet room.

Gloria glanced at her wrist watch.

It was 2.30. And two o'clock was the time that she usually met Stan at the corner for a drive or a hike! He was probably phoning to ask why she had failed him.

"Shall I answer the phone, honey?" Dick asked.

"No, no! Let me do it!" Gloria rushed across the room like a small whirlwind and took the instrument from his hand.

"Hello," she said nervously. To her relief it was not Stan's voice that answered.

"This is Maggie, ma'am," the grim voice at the other end of the wire said. "Will you please go up to the General Hospital right away? Dr. Seymour has just taken Mr. Dick's mother there to operate on her for appendicitis!"

Dick's mother! Gloria could scarcely believe her ears.

Mother Gregory, with her bright eyes and the blown roses in her cheeks, was the last person in the world who looked like a hospital case.

"Mr. Dick's father is out of town," Maggie went on. "And I do think some one of the family should be at the hospital when they operate on poor Mis' Gregory. . . . Please don't let Mr. Dick know about it, ma'am. It might kill him the way his heart is, and all!"

"Of course, I won't," Gloria snapped, as she hung up the receiver.

But how to keep Dick from knowing about his mother, that was the question.

She couldn't go away and leave him all alone in the house, sick and helpless as he was!

And there was no one to stay with him. It was Mrs.

O'Hara's day off. Ranghild had gone to the dentist and wouldn't be back before five o'clock.

Suddenly Gloria thought of Miss Briggs. . . . Yes, she would have to ask Miss Briggs to come and stay with Dick in her absence. There was nothing else to do.

"That was my dad on the phone," Gloria fibbed to Dick. "He says my mother's sick and wants me to go over to the house right away. . . . Would you mind if I phoned Miss Briggs to stay here with you while I'm gone?"

"Oh, I can stay here alone, can't I?" he asked, after a minute's pause. "There's no need to bother Miss Briggs."

"That's nonsense! You can't stay here by yourself!" Gloria cried. She picked up the telephone and called Dick's office.

Miss Briggs' low, sweet voice answered at once.

"Could you leave the office for an hour or two, and come out here to the house?" Gloria asked her. "I've had some bad news from my mother and I've got to leave Mr. Gregory for a little while. It's your sister's day off duty, you know."

"I'll be there right away," Miss Briggs answered. Gloria was sure she could hear a note of eagerness in her voice.

"Did Miss Briggs say she'd come?" Dick asked.

"Did she say she'd come?" Gloria laughed with cutting sarcasm. "Oh, boy, did she! Why, you couldn't keep her away with wild horses! Her idea of a perfect time is taking care of you for an afternoon. . . . You flip it from me, Rikky, she has a real crush on her boss! And don't you forget it!"

"Why don't you phone Mother to come instead?" Dick asked, ignoring Gloria's remarks about Miss Briggs. "I'd rather have her. She hasn't been here for an age."

"Oh, she's not at home to-day," Gloria replied. "I happen to know." She had a sudden vision of Mother Gregory in the white operating room of the hospital.

"I've got to hurry!" she said. "Here, put your arms into your bathrobe! And let me brush your hair. . . . I must doll you all up for Miss Briggs!"

She straightened the covers of Dick's bed and laid the volume of Stevenson's "Vailima Letters" on his bedside table.

"There's your book," she said. "Your darling Susy can sit here with her best bedside manner and read it to you all afternoon in her soothing sickroom voice . . . and you won't miss your Gloria a bit!"

And again she was surprised at the sharp pang of jealousy

that prickled through her at the thought of Miss Briggs sitting there with Dick all afternoon.

"If there's anything I can do for your mother let me know," Dick called after her as she went into her own room to dress. His kindness was a reproach in itself.

How good he was to her! And she didn't deserve it!

Gloria was ready to go long before the doorbell rang.

When at last it did, Gloria snatched up her coat and ran downstairs impatiently.

"If I'd had any sense I'd have sent a cab for you. Time counts in a thing like this!" she said sharply to Miss Briggs as they went up to Dick's room.

Miss Briggs flushed. She knew that what Gloria meant was that if she had had any sense she would have hurried to the house in a cab herself!

She bit her lip and said nothing.

When she opened the door of Dick's room there was a radiant smile in her eyes.

"Good-by, you two," Gloria said, and was gone.

Gloria ran out to the garage and started the little blue roadster. Two minutes later it was skimming the shining wet pavements on the road to the hospital.

Gloria's heart beat fast as she neared the street corner that had become the favorite meeting place of herself and Stanley Wayburn.

... Yes! There he was! Standing in the misty rain, smoking his everlasting cigarette.

He swept off his hat as Gloria headed her car in toward the curb, and stood bare-headed in the rain.

"For the love of Mike, put on your hat! Do you want to catch your death o' dampness?" Gloria asked, opening the door of the car. "Jump in, and be quick about it!"

"If I'm going to catch cold, I've caught it now. You've kept me waiting there in the rain for almost an hour . . . do you know it?" Stan asked. He settled into his seat and shook the raindrops from his pearl-gray hat.

"I wasn't coming to-day at all," Gloria said.

"You weren't coming?" Stan repeated. There was surprise in his voice.

Gloria shook her head.

"No," she answered. "But they telephoned to say that I'd better go right over to the hospital. Mother Gregory's

there to be operated on for appendicitis. . . . I must hurry!"

She pressed her foot down on the accelerator, and the little car shot forward eagerly.

"I asked you to ride with me so I could tell you why I made up my mind not to meet you to-day," Gloria went on bravely. "This is the last time I'm ever going to see you . . . or talk to you."

Stan opened the door of the car and tossed out his half-smoked cigarette.

"What's the big idea, Russet?" he asked, laying his arm along the back of the seat. Gloria leaned forward, away from it.

"You see, it's this way. . . . I've been thinking a lot about Dick and you and me lately," Gloria tried to explain. "I knew I couldn't go on living in the same house with him so long as I was thinking about you all the time . . . seeing you every day.

"Last night I made up my mind to leave and go to New York to get a job on the stage . . . but to-day when I looked at Dick I saw how much he needs me. Why, he's crazy about me, Stan! It would kill him if I went away from him! So I've made up my mind to put you right out of my thoughts and be a good wife to Dick from now on. I owe it to him. . . ."

Wayburn interrupted her with an easy laugh.

"You can't put me out of your thoughts, Russet," he said. "You can chuck me out of your life . . . but you'll go on thinking about me just the same. I know women!"

"Oh, I know you know all about women!" Gloria answered bitterly. "And two weeks after you've left—you'll have forgotten all about me. You'll have a dozen new sweeties. But Dick's not like you, Stan. . . . I'm the only woman in the world for him. That's why I've got to stick."

She slowed down the car and drove up before the hospital where Dr. Seymour had taken Mother Gregory.

"Aren't you making a mountain out of a mole-hill, Russet?" Stan asked, lighting a fresh cigarette. "I haven't hurt you. I haven't asked you to leave your husband for me. Our friendship's been just a flame where I could warm my heart . . ."

"Oh, cut the poetry!" Gloria cried impatiently. "You know just as well as I do that we had no business ever seeing each other. There's no such thing as a harmless friendship

between a married woman and a single man! No woman has enough room in her life for two men!"

"Well, don't get sore at me about it! It's not my fault that you're unhappy with your husband."

Gloria opened her eyes with surprise.

"Well, if that isn't just like a man!" she exclaimed indignantly. "All you've done for the last three months is to follow me around and make love to me at every turn! And then you have the nerve to tell me it isn't your fault that I'm unhappy with Dick! . . . Why didn't you let me alone? I was contented enough until you came back to town."

Wayburn's lip curled in contemptuous amusement.

"I did let you alone, Russet," he said. "It was you who came to the theater to hunt me up, if you remember. . . . I knew what ailed you. You were bored with married life. You wanted something more exciting . . . more jazzy. You wanted a love affair with me. Now, be honest with yourself! Didn't you?"

He leaned forward and took Gloria's gloved hands in his.

"You're just a peppy young Flapper, who got married too soon," he said. "You'll settle down after a while, and be a fine wife. You'll forget you ever knew me."

"Is that what you want me to do?" Gloria asked. "Now that you're leaving town, you're perfectly contented not to see me again, aren't you? You want me not to bother you any more, don't you? You're tired of me."

"I'm not going for two weeks or more," Wayburn answered. "In the meantime, I want to see you just as often as you'll let me see you, Russet. . . . And, let's not quarrel, any more. . . . What's the use?"

Gloria opened the door of the automobile, and slipped out of it. Years afterward, when Stanley Wayburn thought of her, he saw her as she was now . . . her eyes full of unshed tears, her soft mouth trembling.

"I won't see you again," she said briefly. "Good-by, Stan."

Wayburn watched her run up the front steps of the hospital, and disappear within its swinging doors.

"Along about day after to-morrow, she'll be calling me up again," he said comfortably to himself. "I know women."

He turned down the brim of his hat, turned up the collar of his coat, and went away through the slanting gray rain, whistling "My Flapper Wife."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE combined smell of ether and carbolic acid made Gloria a little faint and dizzy as she walked through the hospital.

A fresh-cheeked nurse led her to a bare little room at the end of a long hall on the third floor.

"As soon as they bring Mrs. Gregory down from the operating room, I'll let you know," she said, and went away.

There was a pile of magazines on a fumed-oak table in the middle of the room. Gloria picked one up, and settled down with it, in an uncomfortable wicker rocking chair.

She turned the pages idly. Then she took off her hat and tossed it onto the table. She leaned back against the chair and went to sleep.

She was awakened by the clatter of dishes and silver. Outside the door of the waiting-room was a large cart, laden with trays of food for the patients.

Gloria glanced at her wrist-watch. It was five-thirty. Surely it must be time for them to be bringing Mother Gregory back from the operating room. . . .

At last, Gloria got up and walked out into the hall. A few yards away from where she stood was another cart. From it came a tiny sound, like the cheeping of small hungry robins. She walked over to the cart.

On it, with their little pink hands waving in the air, were four little babies tucked into a nest of soft white wool. Gloria looked at them curiously.

"Aren't they the cutest things you ever saw?" asked a gay voice behind Gloria. She turned to see the little fresh-faced nurse standing there.

"It's their feeding time. That's why they're howling," she explained. "I'd let you hold one of them for a minute, but it's against the rules of the hospital."

Gloria shrank away from her.

"Oh, I wouldn't want to hold one!" she cried. "I'd be afraid of hurting it! I don't know how to hold a baby!"

The little nurse stared.

"A woman doesn't have to learn how to hold a baby. She just knows how, the minute she takes it in her arms. It's born in her," she said.

She gave Gloria a queer, puzzled look as she trundled the baby cart away.

"That is, it's born in most women," she added. "Of course, there are a few that don't like babies, 'specially. But I think they're unnatural and . . ."

Without finishing her sentence she vanished around a corner.

Presently another nurse came into sight.

"Are you Mrs. Gregory?" she asked. Gloria nodded.

"Dr. Seymour wanted me to tell you that the operation is over, and that your mother-in-law came through it very well," she said. "And he says if you'd like to see her, it's all right for you to, now."

"Will you take me to her room, then?" Gloria asked.

Mother Gregory lay on a narrow high bed in a white-walled room. Her face was colorless and covered with sweat. She snored through her parted lips.

As Gloria stood looking down at her, she half-opened her eyes. Her lips moved. She was trying to say something.

Gloria bent her head to listen.

"Dick," she whispered, "Dick."

Then she lapsed into her stupor again.

Gloria tiptoed out of the room.

. . . There must be more to this baby business than she knew!

Here was Mother Gregory, thinking of her son the minute she came out from under the anesthetic! He was still her baby . . . the principal thing in life to her.

And what was it the little pink-cheeked nurse had said? . . . That women who didn't want babies were unnatural women.

Gloria wondered if she were unnatural. She wondered what it would be like to have a baby of her own.

When she got home Ranghild was setting the table. There was an appetizing odor of dinner in the house.

Gloria ran upstairs. The door of Dick's room was closed. Miss Briggs was talking in her low and lovely voice.

Gloria knelt down, and put her ear to the crack of the door. She held her breath and listened.

Footfalls on the stairs—Ranghild to tell her that dinner was ready—brought Gloria sharply to her feet.

"Will you fix a tray for Mr. Gregory and bring it up to him?" she asked calmly, although she was sure Ranghild had seen her eavesdropping at Dick's door. "And there may be a guest for supper, too. Wait a minute and I'll let you know. . . ."

She opened the door of Dick's room and went in.

Miss Briggs had stopped talking. And she and Dick fixed their eyes on Gloria. She remembered the old saying:

"Two's company, three's a crowd."

But she smiled at Miss Briggs and asked how Dick had behaved himself all afternoon.

"Wonderfully well," Miss Briggs answered. "He slept for more than an hour."

"She read me to sleep," said Dick. "She has a voice that's as soothing as rain on a roof."

Miss Briggs blushed with pleasure.

"Oh, dear," thought Gloria, "I wonder if Dick knows how the poor thing adores him?"

Aloud she said, "Our dinner's ready, Miss Briggs. Will you come downstairs and eat with me?"

Gloria saw that Miss Briggs was going to refuse to stay. Before she could, Gloria went on:

"And then, perhaps, you'll read Dick to sleep again afterward?" she asked. "He has a hard time getting to sleep lately. And Mrs. O'Hara wants to stop giving him sleeping powders."

"Very well, I'll stay," Miss Briggs agreed stiffly.

But she turned on Dick a look of exaltation, as if she were telling him there was nothing she wouldn't do for him . . . even to eating a meal with his silly little wife!

Gloria caught the look as she went out into the hall to tell Ranghild to use the best napkins and to put on the salad forks. Then she and Miss Briggs went downstairs.

"Where can I put these?" Dick's secretary asked as they went into the dining-room. She held up a tight package of bills and letters, rolled together by a rubber band.

Gloria took them from her and laid them on the sideboard.

"Dick says you pay all my bills for him. I'm afraid you think I'm awfully extravagant," she said amiably.

Miss Briggs smiled her secret, tight-lipped smile.

"It's not part of my job to think about the bills I pay," she said grimly. "I'm just a bookkeeper."

"I see," Gloria answered. "By the way, I'm getting a little surprise ready for Dick. . . . All winter long he's been planning a rose garden and vegetable garden for the back yard. Of course, he's too sick to attend to it, and I thought I'd go ahead with it myself."

She stopped and looked down at her plate thoughtfully. Then she raised her eyes candidly to Miss Briggs.

"If I do I've got to have some money," she said. "It costs a small fortune for top-soil and rose bushes. Now, what I want to know is whether you'd let me have the money without telling Dick about it. You see I want to surprise him by having the garden all started by the time he's well."

Miss Briggs hesitated. Her blue eyes were troubled.

"I've never drawn any of Mr. Gregory's money out of the bank without asking him first," she said. "How much money would you want?"

"Two hundred dollars," Gloria said promptly. "I want to have a trellis made for the side of the garage, too. . . . There's no reason why you shouldn't let me have the money, Miss Briggs. Dick would be spending it on the yard himself if he were up and around. I'm just going to do it for him."

"That's true," Miss Briggs said. "Shall I send you a check for the money, or do you want it in cash?"

"Cash," Gloria replied.

Miss Briggs buttered a piece of bread thoughtfully.

"I only want to do what's right . . ." she murmured.

After the meal she went upstairs and read Dick to sleep.

Down in the living-room Gloria sat, listening to the low droning sound of her voice.

"She's the kind of woman Dick should have had for a wife," she said to herself. "If he'd had any sense he'd have married her years ago."

She drove Miss Briggs home. On the way back she went into a drug store and telephoned Stanley Wayburn.

"I'll have that money for you to-morrow, Stan," she said. "Meet me at two o'clock at the usual place."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE first thing Gloria did the next morning was to telephone Henry Moss, the gardener, who had sold Dick the dwarf evergreens that circled the house.

She told him just how she wanted the garden in the backyard laid out.

"And send your bill to me, not to Mr. Gregory," she added, "I'm fixing up the yard as a birthday present for him."

"I certainly am getting to be an artist at telling white lies!" she remarked to herself on her way downtown to Dick's office. "All I hope is that I can keep track of the fibs I've told different people."

Miss Briggs had the money ready for her. Gloria counted it . . . ten \$20 bills in a white envelope.

Gloria wished she could keep the money for herself. There was a red dress in one of the stores that she would love to have, a cunning thing with a bell-shaped bodice.

Stan was waiting for her on their street corner.

"Lord, but I hate to take this!" he said, as he slipped the envelope of bills into his pocket. "But it's only a loan. I'll return it to you inside of three or four weeks."

"Yes, I'm afraid you'll have to unless you want me to lose my happy home," Gloria answered frankly. "I got the money from Dick's secretary. And I told her I wanted it for some gardening that I'm having done. So you see, I'll really have to have the money, so I can pay the bill when it comes in on the first of the month."

"Don't worry, Russet, you'll get it," Wayburn answered. There was more than a shade of sarcasm in his voice.

He took a cheap nickeled watch from his pocket and looked at it.

"I made an appointment with the tailor this morning," he said. "And I'm ten minutes late, now. . . . Too bad we couldn't have spent the afternoon together. Meet me tomorrow, will you? We'll go for a hike, eh, what?"

Gloria didn't answer him at once.

She had made up her mind not to see him again.

And besides she was angry with him for making an appointment with the tailor. He might, at least, have tried to persuade her to spend the afternoon with him, she thought!

"N-no," she began.

Wayburn laid one of his hands on her arm.

"Oh, have a heart, Russet," he pleaded. "I'm going away in a week or two. It can't hurt anybody if we see each other once in a while, can it?"

"All right," Gloria yielded. "I'll bring the car here tomorrow at this time. Would you like to drive out into the country?"

"Sure. We'll watch the grass grow, and listen to the zimbabwe bird singing in the amfalula trees," Wayburn answered, nonsensically. He showed his strong white teeth in a broad grin, and went.

Gloria watched him go. He carried himself with an air of engaging insolence.

"He's the best-looking man anywhere!" Gloria remarked to herself. "But I wonder if I'll ever see that \$200 again!"

She didn't know what she would do if Stan failed to pay it back before Henry Moss' bill came in . . .

She walked along the Avenue, window-shopping as she went. The little red dress with the bell-shaped waist was still in the show-window where she had seen it a few days before.

"I think I'll go in and try it on," Gloria thought. "Of course I can't afford it. But I'd like to see how I look in it, anyway."

She went into the store.

"There's a little dress down in the window that I'd like to try on," she told the saleswoman who came to wait on her. "A little red crêpe."

The saleswoman looked at her doubtfully.

"That dress in the window is a small size," she said. "I don't believe it's big enough for you."

"Nonsense," Gloria said sharply. "I weigh only 115 pounds. I always wear misses' sizes."

She took off her own dress in the fitting-room while the saleswoman went to get the dress out of the window.

Perhaps she would buy the dress, after all, if it was becoming. . . .

So long as she was going to see Stan again, she might just as well look pretty for him, she decided.

Gloria drew in her breath as the saleswoman slipped the red dress over her head, and began to fasten it down the back. It was just the least bit tight across the shoulders.

"I'm sorry, but the dress won't go around your waist," the saleswoman said, finally. She straightened up from her task of trying to pull the dress together. Her face was scarlet with the effort.

She slipped a tape measure around Gloria's waist and held it up so she could see the measurements. Gloria gasped.

"Let me try," said Gloria, impatiently. She pulled and tugged at the dress, but it simply would not go around her. At last she unbuttoned it and took it off roughly.

"Would you like to see anything else?" the saleswoman asked.

Gloria shook her head. She put on her own dress, and, carrying her hat and coat over her arm, hurried to the rest-room on the next floor.

She dropped a penny in the weighing machine that stood there, and breathlessly watched the hand swing slowly upwards.

One hundred and twenty-four pounds! . . . Oh, she couldn't weigh that much! The scales must be wrong.

On her way home, Gloria stopped at a drug store and weighed herself again. This time the scales told her that she weighed 125 pounds!

"Well, what do you know about that!" she thought unhappily. "This is what comes from breakfasting in bed, I suppose! But I'll bet I'll lose ten pounds this next week or know the reason why!"

That night Gloria ate no dinner.

When Dick had finished his, and Ranghild had carried the tray downstairs, Gloria went into his room.

"Look at me, Rikky," she said. "Am I getting too fat?"

Dick looked at her critically as she turned slowly around before him.

"You look just the same to me as you always have," he said at last. "I don't see any change in you. You're still the prettiest thing that ever lived!"

"Now, that just proves that you never really look at me! I've gained 10 pounds!" Gloria cried tragically.

Dick laughed at her woebegone face.

"Well, what of it? That's not much. And besides a little plumpness is becoming to a woman," Dick answered. "And if you were as fat as the prize-winner in a Turkish beauty show, you'd still be the loveliest woman in the world to me."

Gloria curled her lip.

"Unfortunately there's other people besides you to look at me," she said. "People who really see me."

"I suppose I see you with my heart rather than with my eyes, Gloria," Dick said quietly.

"That's a good line. Where did you get it? From a Valentine?" Gloria asked impudently.

The next morning she ate no breakfast.

By 9 o'clock she was on her way downtown.

And by 9.30 she was sitting in a steam-cabinet in a beauty shop, trying to perspire away a pound or two before lunch.

Lunch, she decided, would be a cup of coffee without cream or sugar.

It would stimulate her, she figured, without adding an ounce of weight to her body. And Gloria needed something stimulating.

Her head swam, and there was a ringing in her ears, as she sat in the reducing cabinet.

It was terrible. Gloria felt as if she were being burned slowly at the stake.

Marie, the operator, kept putting towels wrung out of ice water on her forehead. But they didn't help much.

Gloria kept telling herself that she didn't care how much she suffered so long as it helped her to get thin.

But at last she could stand the heat no longer.

"Let me out, Marie!" she cried. "Let me out! I've changed my mind! I don't want to be thin if I have to go through this torture! Let me out this minute!"

Marie gave her an enormous Turkish towel to wrap herself in, and told her to lie down on the wicker couch to rest.

"You're just like all my ladies," Marie said. "They all say they'll never get in the cabinet again. But next day they're back for another sweating! . . . Get on the scales, Mrs. Gregory, and we'll see how much you've lost."

Gloria had lost almost a pound in weight. She clapped her hands.

"Well, isn't that wonderful! In just that short time!" she

cried delighted. "I should say I will come back to-morrow, Marie! I should worry how much it hurts! It's worth it!"

"Now there's just one hitch in this reducing stunt," Marie told her. "Sometimes when a woman loses flesh too quickly, her face sags. Don't you think I'd better give you a facial treatment to tone up the muscles? I notice you're getting a double chin."

A double chin! Horrors!

Gloria snatched up a hand mirror and peered into it.

Yes. . . . Marie was right. There was no doubt that there was a creased fullness under her chin.

"Isn't that terrible?" she appealed to Marie. "Can you really massage it away?"

"Massage? Massage has gone out of style," Marie told her. "We pat double chins and wrinkles away now with these little paddles."

She picked up two tiny ivory implements shaped like tennis racquets and showed them to Gloria.

"Japanese women have used them for centuries, and they have the smoothest skins of any women on earth," she went on.

Gloria lay back in the long leather chair before the mirror and closed her eyes.

She winced as Marie wrapped her face in steaming towels, lathered it with a sweet-smelling cream and began to smack it smartly with the little ivory paddles.

"I hope you're not ruining my looks. I have a heavy date at two o'clock," she said. She would hate to have Stanley Wayburn see her with her face red as a lobster from Marie's strenuous treatment!

"I'm not," Marie answered placidly. "You'll look like a million dollars when I finish with you. I'm against most beauty treatments, but this is really good for the skin."

"I used to say," she went on, "that there was nothing like good, cold water for the complexion. And that was all right back in the old days when there wasn't so much smoke and dirt in the world. But these days you've got to get right down into the pores with a good cream to get the grime out of them!"

Gloria didn't answer. She had gone to sleep—utterly exhausted.

She did not waken while Marie powdered and rouged her face, and brushed mascara along her brows and lashes.

"Please take all that stuff off my eyelashes," she said, when Marie had finally wakened her by shaking her briskly. "It makes me look like a clown."

"It does not. It makes you look like a great big wax doll," Marie said. "To my way of thinking you're a lot better looking with your eyes touched up a bit. . . . Don't make the mistake of thinking you're one of the women who don't need make-up, Mrs. Gregory! Only one woman in a thousand is so pretty that she doesn't need it!"

Gloria stared at her crestfallen.

Then she looked into the mirror.

She had always thought that she was the one woman in a thousand who was so beautiful that she didn't need more than the lightest touch of rouge and powder to make her as ravishing as Helen of Troy!

Could it be that she was losing her looks?

She studied her face in the brilliantly-lighted mirror.

No, she wasn't as pretty as she had been. There was a hard look in her eyes, and fat was certainly not becoming to her!

What had happened to her during these few months of marriage to make her look this way?

Gloria wondered if all the cocktails and the wild parties had had anything to do with it? Or her worry over Stanley Wayburn? . . . Well, he'd be gone soon, at any rate.

Gloria, at that moment, wished that he had gone already.

And yet, her heart soared like an early-rising lark as she went out into the street to meet him.

CHAPTER XXIX

"WHAT have you done to your face?" were Stan's first words of greeting as she drove up beside him.

"Oh, I didn't do it. It was done to me," Gloria laughed, rubbing a finger across her darkened eyebrows. "Marie, the beauty specialist, says I'm not pretty enough to suit her. So she fixed me up. How do you like me this way?"

"I don't," Wayburn answered bluntly. "I don't know where all you girls get this idea that we men like to see you all colored up like a barber pole."

"Men hate cheeks of chalk," Gloria quoted glibly.

"They hate cheeks of sun-proof paint, too," Wayburn said stubbornly.

"Oh, I know that. There's no pleasing you men!" Gloria answered. "If we're pale you want us rosy. And if we're rosy, you want us to be pale! Dick wants a home-making wife, so he marries me . . . and I'm a gadfly."

She stopped suddenly, struck by an arresting thought.

"Stan," she said, "what kind of a woman would you want for a wife?"

"None at all," Wayburn answered.

"Not even one with money? You always said you'd marry a woman if she had money enough, you remember," Gloria said.

"I know, but I've a hunch I'm going to make money myself from now on," the actor told her with one of his infrequent bursts of frankness. "This New York engagement looks pretty good to me. At least, Sonya Chotek says it is a good thing."

"Sonya Chotek!" Gloria exclaimed. "Do you mean to say she found this job for you?"

Jealousy swept over her like a wave of heat from a furnace. Wayburn nodded.

"She suggested to the manager of the show . . . Mangold, his name is . . . that I'd do for the leading man," he said

easily. "So I'm going on for the try-out. Of course, I may be a blooming failure. You never can tell."

Gloria was silent. She would never have given Stan that \$200 if she had known he was going down to New York to Sonya Chotek with it!

They were out in the open country now.

The day was perfect. Here and there the white sail of a cloud floated across the dark, blue sky.

There were dandelions in the tangle of wild grass that edged the red brick pavement.

And in the budding branches of the trees robins were singing that song of theirs that is as sweet and cold and gay as spring itself.

Gloria stopped her car at the edge of the road.

"What's the matter now?" Wayburn asked.

"Nothing," Gloria answered. "Only if you don't like my face this way I'm going to change it."

She took out a small handkerchief and began to rub the mascara from her eyes and the rouge from her cheeks.

Wayburn lifted the shadowy brim of her hat at one side and looked at her. He saw that she was crying.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" he asked.

Gloria went on crying quietly. Then, presently, she dried her tears on a little wet ball of a cambric handkerchief. She looked up at Wayburn with wet, red-rimmed eyes.

"How can I help crying?" she asked. "It's bad enough to think of your going away—but to think that you're going where that Chotek woman is. . . ."

Oh, it was too much! Gloria burst into fresh sobs.

Wayburn put his arm around her. There was a look of annoyance in his eyes. Nothing in the world bored him quite so much as a woman in tears. It robbed her of all the beauty that made her a thrilling companion.

"Oh, come, come, Russet!" he said impatiently. "Only a few days ago you were ready and willing never to see me again! How come you've changed your mind so soon? I never know where I stand with you!"

Gloria drew a long sobbing breath.

"If you had my mind you'd want to change it, too," she said. "It's driving me crazy. I try to put you out of it . . . but you keep coming back. I've done my best not to think of

you for weeks. . . . Oh, what am I going to do when you're gone?"

Wayburn patted her shoulder comfortingly.

"Well, I'm not so happy about leaving you, little Russet," he said. "But let's forget it. This may be the last day we'll ever have together. Let's make the most of it!"

He opened Gloria's bag and took out her little vanity case. He powdered her nose and chin with the expertness of an actor who understands make-up perfectly.

Gloria could smell whisky on his breath. She leaned away from him and started the little car.

"That's right, step on her! A fast ride and a merry one, eh, what, Russet?" Wayburn asked. He lit a cigarette. "Want a puff, Baby?"

Gloria took a few puffs. Then she made a grimace of distaste and handed Wayburn the cigarette.

"You know, Dick's made me cut out cigarettes around home," she said. "And I guess I'm losing my taste for them."

Wayburn laughed.

"If you're not careful Dick will make a good woman of you yet," he said. "Doesn't he let you take a drink any more, either?"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world he doesn't. Not if he sees me first!" Gloria answered.

"Tough luck for you," Stan sympathized.

He took a leather-covered flask from his hip pocket and unscrewed the top of it.

"No use my asking you to have a drink of this then," he said cheerfully. He winked at her and tilted the flask against his lips.

Gloria watched him through her eyelashes.

He was darkly flushed and there was a twisted smile on his mouth.

"Don't take any more for a while, Stan," Gloria begged. "You had quite a slant on when I met you to-day. Don't take any more, please!"

Her voice sounded flat and faint in her own ears. Wayburn didn't answer.

"You don't ever need a drink, really, anyway," Gloria went on nervously. "You have plenty of pep without it. I guess you were born 'hooched' . . . And you do drink too much!"

You'll wind up in the Old Soaks' home if you don't watch your step!"

"All right, Carrie Nation, you take a drink, then, and help me get rid of the stuff," Stan suggested sullenly.

He was scowling.

"Now, Stan, don't tempt the driver. She's got to keep her wits about her," Gloria said soothingly.

"One little swig won't hurt you," Stan went on stubbornly. He offered her the flask. "Come on, be a sport!"

Gloria shook her head.

"I never drink when I'm driving," she said.

"Well, this is one time when you're going to!" Wayburn's voice was thick.

Abruptly he gripped her wrist. Gloria could feel his hot breath in her face.

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't. . . ." His mouth sealed hers with a clumsy kiss.

Gloria got her arm between his chest and hers. She pushed him away from her.

"You poor sap!" she almost screamed. "Don't touch me when I'm driving! Do you want me to wreck the car? We're almost in the ditch this minute!"

She steered the car to the middle of the road. The sun had gone behind a cloud-bank, and a few slivers of rain gleamed on the windshield.

"April shower," Wayburn remarked carelessly. He had sunk into the corner of his seat. He was looking at her very hard and intensely. His jaw hardened.

Before Gloria knew what was happening, he had her in his arms again. He bent her head back and kissed the white lids of her eyes.

"Russet!" she heard him say between clenched teeth, "Russet, I want you! I'd give anything I have this minute. . . ."

Gloria forgot all about the car. All she wanted was to get Stan's face away from her. She was frightfully afraid of him suddenly. She raised both her hands from the steering wheel and caught him neatly under his right jawbone.

There came a crash! The sound of splintering glass. A blinding glare as of a thousand lightnings! Then . . . darkness!

There was a roar like Niagara in Gloria's ears. And above

it she heard some one screaming like a wild animal caught in a trap. It was the sound of her own voice.

The patter of gentle rain in her face awakened her.

She was lying in the wet road. Above her towered the little blue car that Dick had given her for her birthday. Its wheels were in the air.

Near her on the rain-streaked clay lay Stan's little flask and his silver cigarette case.

Gloria put out her hand to pick them up. But a sharp pain in her shoulder stopped her. She groaned and shut her eyes with the agony of it.

. . . Then she looked all around her. Where was Stan?

Could he be pinned under the wrecked car? . . . Gloria's breath almost stopped at the terrible thought.

"Stan!" she called. "Stan, where are you? Answer me!"

There was no reply . . . not even an echo.

With almost super-human effort she dragged herself up on one elbow. She looked down the wet road. Far in the distance was a man's figure. Gloria knew it was Stan.

"I suppose he's going for help," she groaned aloud. "And he'd better hurry! For I'm going to die if some one doesn't stop this pain pretty soon!"

She clenched her teeth. Her whole body was a mass of red-hot pain, that grew worse every minute. . . . Then the world seemed to spin away from her. She had fainted again.

The next time Gloria opened her eyes she thought the sun was shining. She seemed to be looking straight into it.

But after a while she saw that it wasn't the sun, after all, but a lamp burning on a table near her. It was an oil lamp with a yellow glass shade.

Beside it sat a little old lady with round, red cheeks, wrinkled like winter apples. She was knitting.

"Where am I?" Gloria thought. Then, suddenly, she remembered.

She made a great effort to speak. And at last she did.

"Where's Stan?" she asked.

"Your husband? That's what we'd like to know!" the little old lady said. She pushed her spectacles up on her forehead and peered at Gloria.

"He came here and told me and the mister that his wife was lying dead under the wreck of his automobile up the road, just as we was settin' down to supper," she said. "And while

the mister was getting his coat on to go back there with him . . . didn't he disappear jest as slick as you please!"

Gloria groaned. That was just like Stan!

"The mister has telephoned to town for an ambulance. It ought to be here for you any minute now," the old lady went on.

As she spoke there came the sound of an automobile outside the house. Heavy footsteps came across the porch of the little farmhouse that sheltered Gloria.

The door of the room opened and an old farmer, followed by two men came in. The two men carried a stretcher.

Gloria screamed with pain when they picked her up and laid her on it.

She whimpered like a hurt animal all the way to town as the ambulance jogged back over the road . . . the same road that she and Stan had traveled that afternoon.

When Gloria opened her eyes again she was lying in the bright, white receiving room of a hospital.

Two nurses were with her. One was gently taking off Gloria's mud-stained clothes. The other stood beside her with a pad and pencil.

"What's your name?" she asked.

Gloria hesitated.

"Gloria Gregory," she said at last.

"Nearest relative?" asked the nurse.

Gloria gave her mother's name and address.

Then she began to cry.

"I want my mother!" she sobbed. "I want my mother. . . . And tell her for heaven's sake to find out what's happened to Stan!"

She hated to think of Stan in his wild, intoxicated state, wandering around the dark country roads.

"Who's Stan? Your hubby?" the nurse asked.

"No," Gloria said. She closed her eyes.

Gloria was asleep when her mother arrived at the hospital.

Mrs. Gordon and the floor nurse sat at the foot of her bed talking in low tones.

"She won't wake up for a while," the nurse said. "We gave her a sleeping powder."

Gloria's mother clasped her hands tightly together.

"You're sure she's not seriously hurt?" she asked for the third time.

"Well, her collar bone's broken and she's pretty well bruised," the nurse answered, for the third time, also. "But she's not going to die, of course."

"Who is 'Stan'?" she asked, after a moment's silence. "She kept asking about 'Stan' before she went to sleep."

Gloria's mother didn't answer.

She knew at once who "Stan" was. That had been what Gloria had always called that good-for-nothing Wayburn!

Mrs. Gordon wondered if Gloria had been seeing Wayburn all during her married life. She wondered if Wayburn had been with her when the car had been wrecked that afternoon.

She stood up and looked at Gloria's face.

A year ago Gloria, in her sleep, had looked as innocent and sweet as a baby. Mrs. Gordon had often told herself so when she had gone into her daughter's room to tuck her up for the night.

Now that look of child-like innocence had gone. There was a new and hard expression around the beautiful mouth.

What had brought it there, Mrs. Gordon wondered.

And as if in answer to her question, Gloria stirred in her sleep and murmured "Stan."

An hour later she stirred again and opened her eyes. She smiled as she saw her mother, who was sitting beside her.

"Car?" Gloria asked, after a few minutes. Her voice was drowsy.

"I guess it's pretty badly wrecked. Your dad's going to see about it in the morning," Mrs. Gordon answered. She took the fingers of Gloria's bandaged hand in hers.

The girl winced and drew them away.

"Stan?" she asked, after another long pause.

Mrs. Gordon shook her head.

"Was it Wayburn who was with you in the car this afternoon?" she asked.

Gloria closed her eyes. She pretended that she was asleep so that she would not have to answer her mother's question.

But her pale lips quivered and a tear slid down her cheek from under her shadowy lashes . . . then another.

"She's been seeing that Wayburn again. I'm sure of it!" Mrs. Gordon said to Gloria's father that night, as they walked home. "The nurse says she's been calling for him ever since she came into the hospital!"

"Do you think he was with her in the car when it turned over?" Mr. Gordon asked.

His little Gloria! His baby girl! . . . Ah, no! She wasn't the kind of woman who ran around with men after she was married!

Not the little daughter that he and mother had raised so carefully! . . . The little daughter who had learned her prayers at his knee! Not his Gloria! There couldn't be anything bad in her!

"Mother, you don't think Wayburn was with our Gloria to-day, do you?" he asked again.

"I'm afraid I do," Mrs. Gordon answered firmly. "I'm afraid I do! She wouldn't answer me when I asked her about him."

CHAPTER XXX

Two weeks later Gloria was able to sit up and have visitors. The first of them was May Seymour.

The minute Gloria laid eyes on May she saw that she was bursting with bad news.

"Well, I must hand it to you for giving the gossips the best nine-day wonder of the year, Gloria!" she said, after she had kissed her on both cheeks.

Gloria started.

"What do you mean, May?" she asked. There was a queer, sinking feeling at her heart.

"Well," May went on cheerfully, "that cat, Mrs. Wing, saw you pick Wayburn up in your car the afternoon of the wreck. She said that Wayburn was three sheets to the wind. . . . And the story's going 'round that you were too squiffy to drive straight. . . ."

"It's not true!" Gloria burst out angrily. "I hadn't had a thing to drink! Not a thing!"

May smiled sweetly.

"You can tell me the truth, dearie! You know I'll never breathe it to a soul," she said.

"I don't care whether you do or not! I tell you I didn't have a thing to drink! It was raining and the car skidded into the ditch, that's all," Gloria said.

"But Stan was with you, wasn't he?" May asked.

"Yes, he was," Gloria answered defiantly. "But how did you know he was?"

"Oh, doctors' wives hear things, you know. Things that happen in hospitals!" May answered mysteriously.

"I'll tell you how I found out about it!" she added a moment later. "Mrs. O'Hara is a friend of one of the nurses who took care of you here at the hospital the night of the wreck. And this nurse told her about your calling for some one named 'Stan' all the time!"

Gloria stared at May without speaking.

"Mrs. O'Hara asked John who 'Stan' was," May went on. "And it never occurred to John who 'Stan' was. . . . But the minute he told me about it I knew you'd been calling for Wayburn! I guess I'm some little Sherlock Holmes!"

"I hope Dick hasn't heard about my calling 'Stan,'" Gloria said. "But I suppose he has!"

May took out her vanity case and powdered her prominent nose.

"By the way, Dick's much better, John says," she remarked. "He thinks he'll be able to come here to see you in a day or two."

And the next afternoon Dick came to the hospital.

Gloria awakened from a cat-nap to find him standing beside her bed, looking down at her. She smiled up at him in welcome.

"Well, Dick Gregory!" she cried. "It certainly seems fine to see you standing on your own feet again! Do you feel really well now?"

"Not well but a lot better," Dick answered. He drew up a chair to the side of the bed and sat down.

"Your car's still in the shop," he said, without smiling. "The man I sent out to tow it back to town said it was pretty badly smashed. . . . Tell me, Gloria, how did you happen to run off the road that day?"

Gloria swallowed hard.

"Well, it was raining, you know," she began, "and the car skidded . . . and that's all. The next thing I knew I was lying in the road with the car on top of me!"

"What were you doing out in the country fifteen miles from home?" Dick went on.

"Oh, don't ask me any more questions!" Gloria cried impatiently. "Haven't I been through enough, lying here flat on my back for two weeks. Give me a little peace!"

"Was anybody with you?" Dick asked relentlessly.

Gloria closed her eyes.

"I'm tired," she said. "Go away."

"Not until you tell me if any one was with you in your car that day," Dick said in a low monotone.

Gloria opened her eyes. She smiled at Dick, showing the two tiny dimples that were tucked in at the corner of her mouth.

"You haven't kissed me yet, Rikky-Tikky-Tavy," she said.

"I'm not going to kiss you," Dick answered calmly.

"Never again?"

"Perhaps . . . but not right now," Dick replied. "Right now I'm interested in just one thing. I want to know who was with you 'way out in the country that day of the wreck! And, by Jove, I'm going to find out, too!"

Gloria burst out laughing.

"Not if I don't choose to tell you," she said. "After all, nobody knows who was along but me! And I'm not going to tell!"

Dick whitened. Suddenly Gloria was sorry for him.

"I was all alone, Dick," she said. "There wasn't any one with me. Cross my heart!"

Dick looked at her quietly for a minute. Then he put his hand into his coat pocket and pulled out a little mud-stained flask, covered with cheap leather.

"How did you happen to have this along with you?" he asked. "Have you taken to solitary drinking, Gloria?"

His wife widened her eyes that were the color of brown pansies.

"Where in the world did you get that thing?" she asked. "I never saw it before in my life."

She shuddered as she looked at the flask. She seemed, still, to see it in Stan's hand as he tried to make her drink from it!

"You mean to tell me, upon your word of honor, that you never have seen this whisky flask before in your life?" Dick asked her.

Gloria answered him gravely. "I mean just that!" she said.

She watched him put the flask back into his pocket.

She drew a long breath of relief.

Then, fascinated, she saw him draw from his coat another shining object . . . a silver cigarette case. It, too, was caked with yellow mud.

"Did you ever see this before, Gloria?" he asked.

Gloria shook her head.

"Never?" Dick asked. "Think before you speak."

"Never!"

Dick smiled scornfully.

"What kind of a woman are you, anyway?" he asked. "You know as well as I do whose cigarette case this is!"

He turned it over, so that Gloria could see the initials that were engraved upon it. . . . "S. W."

Stanley Wayburn!

Gloria took Wayburn's cigarette case from Dick.

Wondering, she turned it over and over in her slim hands.

"Where in the world did you get this thing?" she asked, puzzled. The last time she had seen it, it had been lying in the wet yellow mud beside the wreck of her car. And she was quite sure that she hadn't picked it up.

"The nurse in the office downstairs just gave it to me . . . along with the jewelry you had on when you came into the hospital," Dick answered. His voice sounded tired and flat.

He took a little handful of jewelry from his pocket and tossed it down on the bed. Gloria picked up her rings and put them on. She slid her wrist watch under her pillow.

Then she looked up at Dick. There was scorn written in the lovely depths of her eyes.

"So you knew when you came into this room that I'd been with Stan the day of the wreck!" she said. "And you set a trap for me!"

"Of course I knew. The minute I saw his initials on the cigarette case I knew," Dick answered grimly. "I wish I had the fellow by the throat this minute!" He made a twisting movement with his hands.

"Dick, please don't get excited over this! There's really very little to it!" Gloria pleaded. "I told Stan that day that I was never going to see him again. Truly I did . . . and, anyway, he's going to New York soon. . . ."

Dick stared out of the window at the housetops across the street. He jerked his head toward them.

"I wonder if any of the men who live in those houses have wives like you, Gloria," he said. "I wonder if their wives are the kind who refuse to have children, who go tearing around with other men, who never stay at home . . . who don't even know how to make a home. . . ."

"Well, it's their own fault if they have!" Gloria cried shrilly. "It's their own fault!"

Dick turned toward her.

"How do you mean, it's their own fault?" he asked sharply. "I suppose you mean it's my fault that you've been stepping out with this Wayburn? Because you have, of course!"

"Yes," Gloria answered boldly. "I have. And I'll tell you

why I have, if you want to know . . . because he knows how to be a pal to me, and you don't!"

Dick said nothing. There was a white line around his lips. And a fine sweat came out on his forehead.

"No, you don't!" Gloria repeated as if she were arguing with him. "You think that because you've given me a roof over my head and paid the bills you've done your husbandly duty."

She paused for breath.

"Well, you've kept me pretty busy paying your bills," Dick said. "Although I wouldn't mention the fact if you hadn't brought it up."

Gloria flushed.

"You kick every time I ask you to take me out to a dance or to a picture show," she went on. "Your idea of the end of a perfect day is to go to sleep over the newspaper every night! And I can just sit there and twiddle my thumbs, I suppose? . . . Well, I'm not going to! Not if I see myself first!"

"If I go to sleep over the newspaper it's because I'm dog-tired after my day's work," Dick answered. "And if you did your housework, as you should, instead of lying in bed till noon every day, you'd be pretty tired yourself at night. Other women don't want to be gadding every night in the week, I notice."

Gloria pulled her blue silk bed-jacket around her shoulders. With her uninjured arm she picked up her hand-mirror from the table at the side of her bed. She smiled into it.

"Other women! I should worry about other women!" she said serenely.

She turned so that Dick could see her face snuggled against the pillows, in its halo of short, red-gold hair. She smiled at him with teasing sweetness. The corners of her lips tilted up like the wings of a flying bird.

"Other women aren't as pretty as I am," she said bluntly. "Most of them are mighty lucky to have husbands. And they know it. They work hard to hold them . . . but I don't have to! I don't even need a husband! You know, Rikky, that any stage-manager in the country would be glad to give me a job, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Dick answered truthfully. "You're far and away the best-looking girl I've ever seen. But you remember

what happened to Helen of Troy. In the end she was dog-goned glad to sneak home to the old husband!"

"Yes, but she'd had her good time first!" Gloria said, brightening. "And you'd better treat me gently, Dick, or you'll wake up one of these mornings and find me gone."

"Treat you gently . . ." Dick groaned. "As if I'd ever treated you any other way! Sometimes I think that if I'd pulled a little of the caveman stuff on you, you'd been a better wife. . . ."

He stopped, lost in a new train of thought.

"See here, Gloria," he said after a moment, "I want you to tell me how far this Wayburn affair has gone. Has he made love to you?"

Gloria widened her eyes at him, like an innocent child just waking up from a nap.

"He was trying to make love to me the day I wrecked the car," she said. "I hit him. . . . I forgot all about driving. And the next thing I knew I was lying under the car half dead. . . ."

She began to cry weakly.

Dick put his arms around her very gently.

He could feel the beating of her heart. It fluttered like a frightened bird's, it seemed to him.

"And then you talk to me as if I was a bad woman!" she sobbed. "Just because I want to jazz around and have a little fun. . . ."

Dick patted her round shoulder. When he spoke his voice was harsh. His eyes were filled with passion and tenderness.

"Poor little kiddie!" he said. "I'm sorry."

It was not until he was half way home . . . away from the warmth and perfume of her . . . that he began to doubt what Gloria had told him. She had lied to him so often!

CHAPTER XXXI

THAT night Gloria lay in bed thinking over what she had told Dick about Wayburn.

She had told him the truth. But not the whole truth! Far from it!

She had not told him that Wayburn had kissed her dozens of times.

She had not told him that the reason she had struck Wayburn that day in her car was not because he had tried to make love to her . . . but because she was afraid of his love-making when he had been drinking!

Above all, she had not told him that she had given Wayburn \$200 of Dick's own money! Money that he would probably never pay back!

Ten days later, when Gloria left the hospital, her own little blue car stood at the curb waiting for her. It looked as good as new.

Gloria shuddered when she saw it.

"I don't know whether I have nerve enough to ride home in it or not!" she said shakily to Dick.

"Sure you have. Hop in," Dick encouraged her. "Your nerves are jumpy. You'll be all right pretty soon. Doc Seymour wants me to go away for a long rest. We'll go together, you and I. We both need it."

He started the car.

"Perhaps Mother'll go along with us," Dick said, as the car rolled slowly along. "She looks pretty seedy after that operation of hers."

"Just you dare to ask your mother to go anywhere with us!" Gloria's eyes flashed. "I'd rather stay in this town all my life than go anywhere with your mother!"

Dick tried to change the subject.

"We may not go anywhere ourselves," he said. "We've spent so much money on doctors and nurses and hospitals this month that we won't have much left to go gadding around the country, I guess. Your hospital bill was \$225. I just paid it."

"Oh, sure, tell me what my bill was! Rub it in!" Gloria cried. "Why don't you talk about the money you paid Mrs. O'Hara and Doc Seymour for your own sickness! I get tired hearing about all my expenses!"

Again the sickening thought came to her that Dick would soon find out about the \$200 she had borrowed from him . . . through Miss Briggs.

"Hasn't the gardener started work on the back yard?" she asked in surprise as they drove into the garage.

"No. He came here with a whole raft of rose bushes that you'd ordered," Dick answered. "But I sent him away. We can't afford to fix up the yard just now."

He helped her out of the little car.

It was sunset. The long shadows of the new-leaved trees lay across the grass. The lilies-of-the-valley were in bloom along the fence.

A delicious odor of broiling steak came from the open door of the kitchen where Ranghild was getting supper.

"Home's pretty nice, isn't it?" Dick asked. "It's a pretty good place to be after all. Isn't it, Littlest?"

Gloria raised her eyebrows.

"I guess so," she said shortly.

They went in.

Ranghild opened the door for them. There was a broad smile on her fresh-cheeked face.

Everything was quite as usual.

After dinner Dick picked up the paper and sat down in his armchair to read. In a few minutes he was sound asleep.

The clock in the hall ticked off the leaden minutes.

Eight o'clock! . . . The end of the day for the Gregorys.

For some people it was the peak of all the twenty-four hours!

For some people eight o'clock meant brilliant restaurants, streets filled with rushing taxicabs and cheerful crowds, theaters with their doors wide. . . .

Theaters!

The thought of them brought Stanley Wayburn into Gloria's mind.

Where had he gone?

Where was he now . . . at this very minute?

Suddenly Gloria put her head down on the table before her and cried as if her heart would break.

Dick stirred, woke, lifted his head.

"What's the matter, honey?" he asked, yawning. "What are you crying about?"

Gloria raised her tear-stained face.

"My arm aches," she said. "And I'm lonesome."

"Lonesome?" Dick repeated. "Why should you be lonesome right here in your own house with me?"

Gloria sniffed.

"You!" she cried. "You aren't here when you're asleep! Why don't you stay awake and talk to me?"

Dick laughed good-naturedly. He pulled his lacquer smoking-stand up beside his chair, and filled his pipe. It was a little short-stemmed brier pipe that smelled like a bonfire of autumn leaves.

He puffed for a while in silence.

"Do you want me to tell you what ails you, Gloria?" he asked at last. "What makes you so restless and unhappy?"

There was a troubled look in Gloria's eyes. She turned her wedding ring round and round on her finger nervously.

"Tell me," she said.

"Well . . . you're out of a job," Dick answered her.

"Oh, I might have known that was what you were going to say," Gloria snapped. "You think work is the answer to everything!"

Dick took his pipe out of his mouth. "It is," he said.

"Marriage is a job like everything else," he went on. "But you won't work at it. You'd be happy enough if you got up every morning and made the coffee and got breakfast. You wouldn't have so much time to cry about being lonesome if you had to dust the house every day. You'd have something to look forward to if you were sitting there making a little baby dress this minute. . . . You haven't anything to do! That's all that's wrong with you, honey."

He tapped the tobacco from his pipe into an ash-tray and rose.

"Think it over," he said.

Gloria tossed her head.

"You've got me all wrong, smarty," she cried. "It isn't dusting I need to make me happy. It's dancing!"

Dick laughed.

"Jazz baby!" he said. "Tied up to a nine-o'clock husband!"

"Well, it's no joke . . . you needn't laugh!" Gloria an-

swered him hotly. "I hate to stick around the house like this every night, slowly dying of dry-rot. I want some fun, some parties! . . . If this is married life, I hate it. So there!"

"Well, I'm sorry, Gloria," Dick said soberly. "But I don't see how I can help you out. . . ."

He crossed the room to the bookcases and brought her a thick, shabby volume. It was Flaubert's "Madame Bovary."

"Here's a story of another woman who hated married life," he said. "Read it. There's a lesson in it for you, Gloria."

Gloria took the book and hurled it across the room.

"I don't want to read about life. I want to live it!" she cried. "You Sunday-school prig, you!"

Without another look or word Dick went out of the room.

After a few minutes Gloria could hear the thud of his shoes on the floor of his room upstairs as he threw them down. Then came the sound of his window being raised.

. . . The hall clock struck nine.

"Ye gods!" Gloria wailed to herself. "What a life! Is this what I'm going to do every night for the next fifty years? Sit here, alone, waiting for the clock to strike?"

She hadn't noticed before how deadly dull these evenings with Dick could be.

She was sure Dick didn't think they were dull.

The mere fact that he was in the same room with her satisfied him. He often said so.

There was no doubt about it. . . . Dick adored her.

But she didn't want to be adored in that good, quiet way of his. She wanted to be thrilled—to be swept off her feet!

Gloria's thoughts swung back to Stanley Wayburn.

Little flames seemed to prickle in her cheeks as she thought of the battle they had had that day when she had wrecked her automobile.

Stan had been rather too thrilling that day! . . . She had been afraid of his hot kisses that seared her cheeks . . . of his hands pinning her arms down to her sides.

Yes, she was glad that she had struck him! He had gone too far. . . . But it would be nice to see him again, all the same.

She missed him, terribly!

Gloria sighed as she stood up. Her foot was asleep. She went painfully around the room, snapping off the lights.

She lay awake, tossing on her pillow, until midnight . . . thinking of Stanley Wayburn.

The next morning Gloria started out to walk to her mother's house.

But on the way she changed her mind.

She would go to see May Seymour instead! May was always cheery and peppy. And Gloria felt that she was badly in need of both cheer and pep.

She found May in the kitchen washing her little chow dog, Mah Jong.

May's hair was wound up in curlers. She was in a pink crêpe kimono and her face was shiny with traces of cold cream. She looked anything but pretty.

"Hello," she greeted Gloria. "Look at me, breaking all the rules of 'How to hold a husband'! This is the way I hang around the house most of the time . . . looking like the witch of Endor! And John sees me this way and he goes right on loving me just as much as if I were a raving beauty. Can you beat it?"

"You cannot," Gloria answered, seating herself on one corner of the kitchen table. "But don't take too many chances, May. Men don't stay in love forever with wives who run around the house in curl papers and cold cream. They all fall for a pretty face."

May rolled the struggling, yipping Mah Jong in a towel before she replied.

"No," she said then. "You're all wrong, Gloria Gregory! When a man really cares about you he loves you just as much when you're ugly and blue and have a cold in the head . . . as he does when you're wearing a marcel-wave, a pound of make-up and your vampiest clothes! . . . That's the way John cares about me. He likes me, not my looks."

"I can't agree with you," Gloria remarked.

"Now there's Jim," said May, with her head on one side. "Jim can't see a girl for trees unless she looks like a movie queen. . . . Speaking of Jim reminds me of something else. Have you been asked to the party Mrs. Wing is having this afternoon?"

"N-no," Gloria faltered.

"Looks as if she was giving us the hinky-dink, doesn't it?" May asked. "Does she know you've been skipping around with Wayburn?"

"No," Gloria began. Then she stopped. She remembered that she had been out walking with Wayburn one day when they had met Mrs. Wing.

"Yes, she's seen me with Stan," she said.

"And she started the story that you were out riding with Wayburn the day you ran your car into the ditch!" May burst out excitedly. "I'll bet she's put you in the same class with me and Jim. . . . She thinks I'm terrible. She doesn't even speak to me when we meet on the street any more. She hands me the ice-tongs right!"

She scrambled up from the floor.

"I tell you what, Gloria! We'll throw a party ourselves!" she cried. "I'll get some of the old gang together for this afternoon! Eh, wot?"

"Fair enough! Let's do it!" Gloria was delighted. "I'm starved for a party!"

May sat down at the telephone in Dr. John's study.

Gloria took Mah Jong into the living-room where a wood fire was burning in the grate. She rubbed the little beast until he was dry and fluffy. The minute she set him down on the floor he scurried away to find May.

He was at her heels when she came into the room.

"I couldn't round up very many people," she said disconsolately. "I guess most of the girls are going to Mrs. Wing's party. But I got Ann Somers. And Jim is going to bring out a couple of boys from his office. Awfully nice fellows. I told them all to come for lunch. . . . Will you run over to the delicatessen and get some cold meat and a couple of pies while I get dressed and set the table?"

The delicatessen was a mile away. And when Gloria returned May's "party" was under way.

Ann Somers was making cinnamon toast in the kitchen. She was a shy little widow with mouse-colored hair and big gray eyes. She was very popular with men. She let them all make love to her and then she cried about it afterward. Apparently it made a great hit with them.

Jim Carewe called her "the red lily."

"Ann, you're some kid," he was saying to her when Gloria came into the kitchen. "You know doggoned well that you're not going to marry Ted Sawyer. Why don't you tell him so, instead of letting him dangle in the wind?"

Ann went on buttering her toast. She hadn't seen Gloria come into the kitchen.

"Well, I've got to have some one to take me around . . . since you won't, Jim," she answered softly. "Ted does as well as any one."

Gloria coughed and cleared her throat.

"The nasty little cat!" she said to herself. "I'll bet she's trying to land Jim because of his money. In the meantime she's keeping this Ted hanging around in case Jim doesn't bite! Why can't Jim see through her?"

What fools men were to let women pull the wool over their eyes the way they did! Gloria felt like shaking Jim Carewe as she watched him pat Ann Somers' shoulder.

She banged her packages down on the kitchen table and went into the living-room.

May was dancing the Texas Tommy for Ted Sawyer and Jim Collins, the two nice young salesmen from Jim's office. Presently Jim came in with a tray of "horse's necks."

"Ann says lunch is ready," he said. "Isn't this a good party, boys?"

Every one but Gloria seemed to think it was a good party. She couldn't dance because of her bandaged arm and shoulder. She didn't want her horse's neck or her cigarette. She felt "blue" somehow.

At four o'clock she went upstairs and got her hat.

"Good-by," she said to May, as she and Jim danced past the living-room door where she was standing. "Just let me sneak away without saying 'good-by' to the others. They won't miss me."

"Whatsa matter?" May asked. "Lost your pep or don't you like my party?"

May stopped dancing and shoved Carewe down into an armchair.

"Park yourself there for a minute, Jim!" she said. "I want to talk to Gloria."

She came out into the hall, closing the doors behind her as she came. She sat down on the bottom step of the stairs and looked up at Gloria with puzzled eyes.

"What's the matter with you, anyway?" she asked. "I've noticed that you've been singing the blues to yourself, all day. You haven't had a bit of a good time, have you?"

Gloria shook her head.

"No," she confessed, "I haven't. I feel awfully 'blah,' somehow or other, to-day."

"You're worrying about that sap, Wayburn," May said with sudden bluntness. "And you're a fool to do it! I've had his number ever since the night of your party when he made such a fuss over Myra Gail. He's some sheik. . . . At least, he kids himself that he is!"

Gloria looked intently at her fingernails.

"Stan's left town," she said at last. "So don't worry about him and me any more. . . . And I don't know what's the matter with me, May. Honestly."

But she did know.

She was terribly lonely without Wayburn.

"What's the use of pretending?" she asked herself on the way home through the streets, warm and sunny in the late afternoon quiet. "I'm homesick for Stan. That's what's the matter with me. That's all that's wrong with me."

Wayburn had filled her idle days with interest, for months past.

When there was nothing else on hand, he was always ready to go for a drive or a hike with her. He always had a new dance to teach her . . . or the latest New York hit to sing to her.

He had a ready laugh, and a wealth of funny stories. He was amusing. Gloria had always called him her "one-man show."

Now that he was gone, time hung heavily on her hands. She didn't know what to do with herself all day long.

"I'm lost without Stan. That's about the size of it," she told herself, as she turned the corner of her own street.

The mother of the Donberg twins was just ahead of her, followed by her lovely offspring on roller skates.

Across the street two of the neighbors stood gossiping on the driveway between their houses. Gloria looked at them, curiously.

They seemed happy and contented in their placid, deep-bosomed maturity . . . those two women.

"But I wonder if they really are," Gloria asked herself. "Or are they sick and tired of married life, like I am?"

She quickened her steps and caught up with Mrs. Donberg.

"Hello, there," said the twins' mother. "It's nice to see you

around home again. I tried to get to the hospital to see you, but the twins were both sick in bed with bronchitis, and I never poked my nose outside the house for two weeks!"

She sighed. "It's just one thing after another for a woman, isn't it?" she asked. "Now it's the spring sewing, and then the canning season will be here, and after that the fall cleaning and sewing! . . . My goodness, I don't get time to do half the things I'd like to do!"

Gloria looked at her intently. Was this little, bright-eyed smiling woman discontented like herself?

"What would you like to do, really?" Gloria asked her.

Mrs. Donberg laughed.

"Well," she said, "I've had three cans of blue paint up on my broom-closet shelf for three months," she said, "and I know it sounds silly to say it, but I just can't seem to find time to paint the twins' bedroom set with it! That's what I'd really enjoy. Fixing up my house so it would be pretty, like yours, Mrs. Gregory."

Gloria's interest flagged.

She certainly had nothing in common with the little "haus-frau" beside her!

She said good-by to her and walked on.

CHAPTER XXXII

DICK was in the side-yard transplanting some cannas along the house.

"Hello, where have you been all day?" he greeted her.

"At May's house," Gloria answered briefly.

Dick ran up the front steps and opened the door for her. He followed her into the house.

He asked her how May was. He told her that Mrs. Gordon had telephoned an invitation to spend the day with her, to-morrow.

But Gloria knew that that was not what he had come into the house to say.

He said it leaning up against the newel-post at the foot of the stairs, nervously tapping the trowel he still held, on the polished wood.

"Doc Seymour thinks I ought to go away for a rest," he said. "How would you like to go with me to the mountains for a couple of weeks, or so? It would do us both good."

Gloria's eyes narrowed.

"Is your mother going along, by any chance?" she asked, biting off the words, like little bits of ice.

"We-ll, Doc Seymour thinks she ought to go along," he began. "She's not getting over her operation as well as he hoped. . . ."

Gloria interrupted him, snappishly. "Is she going?" she asked sharply. "Now don't hedge, Dick! She is going, isn't she?"

"I don't see how I can very well tell her you don't want her with us," he said. "After all, she's my mother, Gloria."

"Well, go with her, then! But count me out!" Gloria cried passionately. "I wouldn't go to the most wonderful place on earth with your mother, Dick. I can't stand her!"

Angry tears sprang to her eyes. But she brushed them away with the back of her hand, and ran upstairs.

She went into the little taffeta-hung room that had been hers

since the beginning of Dick's illness. She locked the door behind her.

In a moment Dick was there, rattling the knob.

"Open the door, Gloria," he pleaded, "and we'll talk this thing over sensibly. . . . What's the use of your taking it this way? Even if Mother goes with us, you won't have to see much of her. . . . Open the door please!"

"Oh, dry up and blow away!" Gloria answered crossly. "I'm not going to talk about it any more! You go with your precious mother, and I'll find something to amuse me here . . . never fear!"

She stopped suddenly. She had just found the letter! Stanley Wayburn's letter! . . . There it stood, propped up against a tall perfume bottle on her dresser, where she would be sure to see it.

With shaking fingers, she ripped open the cheap, white envelope.

"Dear Russet," the letter read. "I trust this letter will find you well and happy. After I sent the old farmer to get you the day of the accident, I beat it. I thought you were dead when I saw you lying under the car, and I knew if I stayed I'd be mixed up in a scandal. Believe me, I was glad when I heard that you'd only had a few broken bones. If any one happened to find my silver cigarette case, will you send it to me?"

"As always, S. W."

Below the letter he had penciled his address.

He was living on Forty-second street, in New York.

Forty-second street! The words brought to Gloria a sudden vision of electric lights, dashing taxicabs, gay crowds of people, red-striped awnings before restaurant entrances . . . !

Her breath caught in her throat. How she would love to be there! Part of the movement, the color, the riot, the noise!

There was corned beef for dinner that night . . . corned beef with horse-radish sauce and boiled cabbage.

"I hate corned beef!" Gloria exclaimed when the meal was almost over. "I wish you'd give me a little more money to keep house on, Dick. Then we wouldn't have to eat this horrible stuff, just because it's cheap!"

Dick laid down his knife and fork on his plate. He looked across the table at Gloria thoughtfully.

"That reminds me," he said. "Miss Briggs said she let you have \$200 of mine while I was sick to spend on the backyard. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you for that money, Gloria. . . . We can't afford to spend it just now. That's why I'm trying to fix the place up, myself."

Under the tablecloth, Gloria's hands were twisting and untwisting themselves frantically.

She tried to open her mouth to speak. But she couldn't make up her mind what to say.

What could she say? What was there to say?

She had given up all hope of Wayburn's paying back the money!

She sat silent, looking at Dick with her great brown eyes fixed and staring. Then she began to cry. Tears always distressed Dick horribly, she knew.

He got up and came around the table to her. He drew her up from her chair, and out of the room. He led her to the davenport in the living-room and pushed her down into its velvety depths.

"Poor little thing!" he said, "are you afraid to tell me what you did with the money? . . . You spent it, didn't you?"

Gloria nodded, sobbing against Dick's breast.

"There, there, don't cry," he said. "It doesn't matter, honey. I wouldn't have mentioned it to you, only we're dead-broke. I'd have given it to you for hats and things, if I weren't right down to rock bottom!"

Gloria wiped her eyes, and looked up at him.

"Then, where are you going to get the money to go away on your trip?" she asked. "I should think you'd go right back to work to-morrow, if you're down to your last dollar! Instead of planning an expensive trip!"

Dick groaned despairingly as he dropped into his armchair.

"That's what I'd like to do . . . get back to work," he said, "but Doc Seymour won't let me go back into the office until I've put on ten pounds. He says I'll go all to pieces if I do."

He cleared his throat and went on with difficulty.

"I'm going to mortgage the house," he said. "You see, I've just got to get some money to tide us over 'til I start earning

again. Gosh, I hate to put a plaster on it, too, but I guess it can't be helped. We've had a pretty tough run of luck, lately, you and I . . . haven't we, sweetheart?"

Gloria nodded. She patted the bandage across her aching shoulder.

"I should say we have!" she answered.

"By the way, what's become of Wayburn?" Dick asked. "I still have that cigarette case of his. I ought to give it to him."

"You can't," Gloria answered. "He's left town."

The moment she had said it she could have bitten off her tongue for her stupidity.

"Hmm!" Dick mused, "that's so. . . . A letter came for you from New York to-day. I told Ranghild to put it on your dresser. Did you get it?"

"Yes," Gloria faltered. "I did."

"Who writes you letters from New York?" Dick asked.

Gloria could feel Wayburn's letter inside her blouse, where she had slipped it. It crackled against her flesh with every breath she drew.

. . . There really was nothing inside the letter that she couldn't show Dick, she was sure.

It was as harmless a letter as ever had been written.

There was not a single word in it to suggest that it had been penned by a lover to the lady of his dreams.

Gloria pulled it from her dress and handed it to Dick.

"Here, read it yourself," she said. "It's from Stan Wayburn."

But Dick didn't read it. He didn't open it. He hardly touched it . . . just long enough to toss it down on the teak-wood table at the end of the davenport.

His face was white under the light of the tall lamp that stood there.

"So?" he questioned. "My wife carries Wayburn's letter against her heart?"

Gloria laughed.

"Dick, you're absurd," she said. "I never thought of its being against my heart. I stuck it into my blouse, so Ranghild wouldn't find it and read it."

"I see," Dick said. But his face was grim. He sat down in his armchair, and filled his pipe. He picked up the book he was reading. Then he laid it down upon his knees.

"Gloria," he said abruptly. "Tell me the truth for once in your life. . . . Are you or are you not in love with Wayburn?"

"I don't know," Gloria answered. She had asked herself that question a thousand times. And she never answered it the same way twice.

"That's nonsense," Dick went on impatiently. "You must know how you feel about him! . . . Tell me this: you don't care about me, any more, do you?"

Gloria looked across the room at him with the calm eyes of the Sphinx, herself. But his question had set thoughts to buzzing like bees in her head.

How much did she care about Dick?

Would she miss him if he went away from her as she missed Stanley Wayburn?

She wondered.

She felt Dick as something trustworthy, honest and good beyond measure. Good all the way through. . . . That was Dick.

But did she love him?

"I don't know, Dick," Gloria said at last.

She sat up straight, pulling herself together like a woman who had something to say and meant to say it now!

"I'll try to tell you how I feel about you, if I can, Dick," she said. "To begin with, I hate housework. I hate having to run this house for you. It makes me sick and tired. And sometimes I almost hate you for marrying me and turning me into a housewife!"

Dick gave a short laugh.

"Bah!" he said. "You a housewife! That's pretty good, Gloria. You haven't done a day's housework in your whole life! How do you know whether you hate it or not?"

Gloria waved his words aside.

"Now don't interrupt me!" she snapped at him. "When I married you, I was awfully tired of office work. I was tired of playing around with fellows who didn't want to get married. . . . And you looked awfully good to me. See?"

Dick nodded.

"I see perfectly," he said. "You wanted to marry Wayburn, but he didn't want to marry you. I came along, and you thought I had a lot of money. So you married me. Isn't that it?"

Gloria shook her head so that every curl on it quivered.

"No, no. That wasn't it," she said quickly. "I'm not such a gold-digger as all that! But I knew you'd be awfully good to me if I married you. And . . . you know I did care for you, Dick, don't you?"

Dick puffed his pipe in silence. He passed his hand across his forehead, cold and wet with sweat.

"Was Wayburn ever in love with you?" he asked.

"I thought he was once," Gloria answered, "but I found out that he wasn't."

She got up and came across the room to Dick. She sat down on the arm of his chair and put her face down against his hair.

"Dick," she said, "I know that Stan's whole body isn't worth your little finger. He's not good like you are. . . . But I do miss him! He's a lot of fun. I love to dance and jazz around with him. He's my kind. . . ."

Dick held himself together hard. "All right, all right," he said. "I've heard all I can stand to hear about Wayburn. But he's gone now, thank God! You and I can make a fresh start, can't we?"

"I hope so," Gloria answered uncertainly.

Dick pulled her down onto his knees and held her away from him by both arms. His eyes searched her face.

"Gloria," he said, "while I'm away these next two or three weeks, I want you to think things over. We've been married six months, and we've done nothing but bicker and quarrel. . . . I can't live like that. This Wayburn business has been the last straw. It's just about finished me!"

Gloria looked at him in surprise.

She didn't mind a good quarrel. She rather liked it.

In fact, she enjoyed a scene! It was exciting, if nothing more. She was excited now.

"I don't want you to live with me unless you love me," Dick went on. "I couldn't stand that. So you think it over and make up your mind what you want to do while I'm gone. Will you?"

Gloria widened her eyes in astonishment.

"Do you mean to say you're going away and leave me at home alone, Dick Gregory?" she cried. She got up from his knees.

"I thought you said you didn't want to go?" Dick answered.

"I said I wouldn't go if your mother went with us," Gloria explained. "And you've just got to tell her she can't go with us!" She stamped her foot.

"I'm sorry, but she's made all her plans to go. She doesn't think for a minute that we don't want her," Dick said anxiously. "How in the deuce can I tell her that we don't want her to go, sick as she is? It would break her heart."

Gloria smiled maliciously.

"All right, dearie," she said smoothly. "You go with your mother and leave me here alone, if you want to. . . . You do it, and believe me, you'll be sorry for it to your dying day!"

Dick groaned in despair.

"Oh, have a heart, Gloria," he said. "How can you be so cruel to a woman as old and sick as my mother?"

"I suppose I'm not sick, myself!" Gloria cried. "I suppose I haven't been in the hospital myself, for weeks! . . . She doesn't need this rest a bit more than I do. Not a bit!"

Dick made no answer.

"If she goes, I don't!" Gloria blazed at him. "I wouldn't go anywhere with her on a bet! Everything I did or said, all the time we were gone, she'd razz me for. . . . Oh, I know her! . . . And you'll just have to choose between us, Mr. Man!"

Dick sat silent for a few minutes, puffing at his little brier pipe. Then he got up, put on his hat, and went out doors. He always went for a long walk, by himself, when he was upset or troubled about anything.

Gloria stood still in the middle of the room. A smile across her face . . . the slow, sly smile of Mona Lisa.

"Dick'd never leave me home for two or three weeks," she said to herself. "He's crazy about me!"

She went upstairs and began to sort out the clothes she would need for the trip. She was sure she was going. . . .

There was a surprise in store for her.

On Saturday morning, Dick and Mother Gregory went away on an early morning train!

Up to the last moment Dick had begged Gloria to go along. And up to the last moment Gloria had refused to go.

"Not with your mother!" she had said over and over. She was sure that, in the end, Dick would take her instead of his mother.

Even now as she stood at her bedroom window, watching his cab turn the corner of the street, she couldn't believe that he had gone and left her behind.

Thunderstruck, she pounded the frame of the window with her clenched hands, in a fit of rage.

"Oh, I hate him! I hate him!" she cried. "He'll be sorry for this!"

A knock came at the door. Ranghild stood there.

"Did you call me, ma'am?" she asked. "I thought I heard your voice."

"No. . . . Yes!" Gloria said. "Telephone the station, please, to see what time the next train for New York leaves."

She bathed and dressed in a fever of speed. She packed a suitcase. Before she had finished Ranghild came upstairs with the coffee tray.

Standing by the dresser, Gloria gulped down two cups of the hot, satisfying drink, and nibbled a piece of toast.

"My last meal in this house!" she told herself, angrily.

She took her purse from the top drawer of her dressing-table. There was \$95 in it that Dick had given her to pay the food bills for the month.

Downstairs in the drawer of her little desk, there was another \$5 bill that she had put aside for a beauty treatment.

Gloria ran down to get it. She sat at the desk and wrote a note to Dick.

"Good-by," she scribbled. "I told you, you'd have to choose between your mother and me. And I guess you've chosen. So I'm off in a flutter of dust. I was the wrong wife for you, anyway. You should have married some nice, homely woman like Miss Briggs."

Gloria did not sign the cruel little note. She put it into an envelope and laid it on the table under Dick's ash tray where he would be sure to see it when he came home.

"Ranghild," she called as she heard the girl in the hall outside. "I'm going away. When Mr. Gregory comes back from his vacation, show him this letter I'm leaving here for him."

"Oh, ma'am!" said Ranghild, clasping her hands together. She was sure that something was wrong. "I hope you come back soon!"

Gloria pretended not to see the distress in her eyes. She picked up her bag, and hurried past her.

She closed the door of the house behind her.

"Good-by to Sing-Sing prison!" she said, looking back at it, as she went down the street.

CHAPTER XXXIII

GLORIA felt as if she were sleep-walking as she followed the red-cap who carried her bag through the great noisy railroad terminal.

Outside, she drew a deep breath of air . . . New York air! She shook herself. She was really here!

"Free at last!" she sighed. "I'm glad I came! I'll never go back! Never!"

Her heart beat high and wildly as she hailed a taxicab.

A woman on the train had told her about a clean little hotel in West Eleventh street.

Gloria made up her mind that she would go there first to freshen up. She was dirty and tired, after her journey.

. . . And then—and then, she would hunt up Stanley Wayburn!

She sat back in a corner of the taxicab and watched New York whirl by outside the windows. In the pale sunshine, the tall buildings seemed rich and wonderful. The very trucks and busses seemed marvelous to Gloria that day. . . . She was going to see Stanley Wayburn!

Perhaps she would go on the stage and become a great star!

. . . And this big, careless town, this New York, would be hers to struggle with, to conquer! Perhaps she would write her name in electric lights against the night sky of Broadway yet!

At the little hotel she registered as "Miss Gloria Gordon" . . . a better stage name than "Gloria Gregory," she decided.

She went upstairs to the tidy, dehumanized hotel room, and unpacked her bag.

She bathed. She brushed her red-gold hair until it shone like polished copper. She "did" her nails, and rubbed perfume into the palms of her hands, and on the nape of her neck. She rouged her cheeks.

"'When tulips bloom in Union Square . . .'" sang Gloria, happy for the first time in weeks.

She was happy!

And wasn't she pretty, though! She put her head on one side and laughed at herself in the looking glass. . . . Oh, she could land a job in a beauty-show all right!

If Stan couldn't help find her a job, she'd go to Kit Cameron!

Kit was a chorus girl in the "Gayeties" . . . the most beautiful chorus in the world! And Kit could introduce her to the great Ginfeld, himself.

Gloria was sure that if Ginfeld saw her, he would give her a place in the "Gayeties" . . . She was sure she was beautiful. Dick had always told her she was the prettiest woman in the world.

Dick! The thought of him made Gloria's heart ache for just a minute. She put the thought of him aside. . . . She closed her heart against him.

She threw back her head, and studied herself with eyes that were like dark stars under their white lids. She smiled into the mirror. She knew that she was better-looking than Kit Cameron had ever dared to be!

Gloria's spirits began to sink as she stood on the sidewalk and looked up at the dingy, narrow building that was Stanley Wayburn's boarding house.

"I wonder if he'll be glad to see me," she thought.

She was filled with panic as she went up the worn stone steps, and rang the doorbell.

"Is this where Mr. Wayburn lives . . . Mr. Stanley Wayburn?" she asked the tall, black-haired woman who opened the door.

"Yes, 'tis," the woman answered. "Who's wanting him?"

"I'm—I'm his sister," Gloria faltered.

"Well, he ain't home," the woman said. "He'd oughta be here in a few minutes. Wanta go up and wait for him?"

"Yes, thank you," said Gloria. She followed the boarding-house keeper up the red-carpeted stairs to the second floor.

Stan's rooms were at the back of the house, overlooking a dirty backyard. Upstairs some one was practicing on a doleful saxophone.

But the rooms themselves were cheerful enough.

There were magazines scattered about. A tin box of cigarettes and a cocktail shaker stood on the table. Stan's

bright silk house-coat was thrown over the back of a chair.

Everywhere there were pictures of women . . . the photographs that Gloria first had seen in Stan's dressing room in the theater back home.

She looked at them, again.

Then she saw that there was a new one among them!

It stood all by itself in a Dutch-silver frame on a table in one corner. The pictured face in it was broad and fore-shortened. It was crowned by a swirl of blond hair . . . It was Sonya Chotek's face!

Live pangs of jealousy stabbed Gloria like two-edged knives at the sight. She wondered if Stan was in love with that face. . . . She wondered if he thought Sonya Chotek was beautiful.

Was she beautiful? . . . Gloria picked up the picture of the actress and studied it closely. Then she crossed the room to a mirror that hung there against the wall, and looked at her own face. Under the deep coppery waves of her hair, it smiled back at her . . . vivid and sparkling.

"Pooh!" she said aloud, "I make her look like thirty cents!"

She put Sonya Chotek's picture back on the table, so that it faced the wall.

It was then that the telephone in Wayburn's bedroom rang. Gloria flew to it and unhooked the receiver.

"Hello," she said.

The voice that answered her had a foreign accent. It was a woman's voice. It was Sonya Chotek's voice, Gloria knew at once.

"Who is this speaking, please?" it asked.

Gloria didn't answer. She banged the receiver back on its hook, and turned away from the phone. Then she stopped dead-still.

Wayburn had come in. He was standing in the doorway between the two rooms. Of course, he must have been listening. . . .

He stared at her as if she had been a ghost. "For the love of Mike! Where did you drop from?"

Gloria's voice was wistful when she answered. "From home, of course—aren't you glad to see me?"

Wayburn ignored her question.

"Who was that on the phone just now?" he asked harshly.

"Oh, just some Jane who wanted to talk to you," Gloria

replied. She managed to ripple a laugh at him, flippantly, as she walked past him into the sitting-room.

She was hurt—bewildered. What was the matter with Stan? The Stan who used to catch her hands in his, give her a look that was like a caress, and call her "Russet"?

"Aren't you going to ask me to sit down, or say you're glad to see me, or anything?" she asked.

She dropped into a chair, and watched Wayburn through her lashes. He took off his overcoat and hung it up. He lighted a cigarette with a steady hand. He drew up a chair and sat down.

And not until then did he answer her.

"Well," he said, "as a matter of fact, I'm not exactly tickled to death to see you, Gloria. . . . What have you done? Left your husband?"

Not exactly tickled to death to see her! Stan not glad to see her? . . . She tried to speak but her lips would scarcely move. They were white and drawn.

"I suppose you'd call it that—" she said at last. Her voice vibrated high and thin, like a violin string that has been stretched too taut. It broke suddenly.

She wanted to tell Stan how empty life at home had been for her since he dropped out of her life—how terribly she had missed him.

But his coldness froze her. She couldn't tell him anything. Her voice was congealed in her throat.

"Does your husband know you're here with me?" Wayburn asked. He gripped the arms of his chair with both hands as he leaned forward, hanging upon her answer.

"Suppose he does know it? What difference would it make?" Gloria's voice was a dull whisper.

"Difference!" Wayburn shouted. "It would make a deuce of a difference to me!" He began to dash up and down the room like a caged tiger.

He stopped suddenly before her chair, and glared down at her.

"Do you suppose I want to be dragged into your troubles?" he asked violently. "Do you suppose I want that husband of yours to hunt me up and shoot me, eh?—What could I do with you, anyway—"

Gloria saw in a flash how his mind was working. She shook with cold anger that was like an icy chill. And when

she answered Wayburn her voice came from between clenched teeth. She couldn't get them apart.

"I see what you're driving at, Stan," she said. "You think I'm asking you to take care of me—well, I may be cheap, but I'm not so cheap as that!"

Her anger broke over him suddenly like flooding waters bursting through a dam.

"I'm not such a fool as to expect help from you!" she cried. "Why, you can't take care of yourself!—I'll bet you're still living on that \$200 you borrowed from me!"

She could see Wayburn wince. That had got under his skin!

"Don't worry, I'll pay every red cent of it back!" he said.

Gloria sneered. "I'll frame it when I get it," she said. She wanted to hurt Wayburn. She hated him, suddenly, as she had never hated any one in all her life before—

The telephone in the other room rang sharply. Wayburn slammed the door after him as he hurried in to answer it.

Gloria tiptoed to it, and laid her ear against the panels of it to listen.

"Hello, Sunshine," she heard Wayburn say. Her lip curled. That was like Stan—to call Sonya Chotek "Sunshine," as he had once called her "Russet."

Pet names were part of Stan's love-making, part of his "line" with women! Little caressing names that were like kisses on his lips as he whispered them! And they meant exactly what his kisses meant. Nothing! Nothing at all!

Oh, she had found Stan Wayburn out at last. He was a coward and a cad. Why hadn't she seen it long ago?

Wayburn came back into the room. He sat on the arm of Gloria's chair, and laid his hand on Gloria's shoulder.

"Now, let's talk this over quietly," he said.

At his touch, all the fury went out of Gloria. She hated him, yes, but with a kind of misery. She turned in her chair and looked up at him, pleading with her eyes.

"Don't send me back home, Stan!" she begged. "If you knew how lonely I've been! . . . If you only knew! Look here, I'll get a job on the stage. Maybe Kit Cameron can get me into the show she's in. . . ."

Wayburn got up.

"No, you'd better go home," he said brutally. His voice cut like a whip. And Gloria went mad for a moment.

She crossed the room, and picked up Sonya Chotek's picture. She held it above her head, and brought it down hard on the back of the nearest chair. The glass broke in a hundred pieces. . . . Above the crash of it, Gloria heard the sound of Wayburn's laugh.

"Well, that's about all you can do about it!" he said. "I married Sonya Chotek yesterday!"

Gloria took the news of Wayburn's marriage as she might have taken the news of his death—standing very straight and still. Too hurt to cry! Too shocked to say a word!

So he had married Sonya Chotek yesterday. . . .

There was a strained look in her eyes as she turned them from Sonya's broken photograph to Wayburn's face. They searched it as if it could tell her all she wanted to know.

At last she found her voice. "How long have you been in love with her?"

Wayburn smiled. "For quite a long time, if you must know," he said. "Months."

It began to dawn upon Gloria that she had been treated shamefully by Wayburn.

He had made love to her when he had really been in love with Sonya Chotek. And he had borrowed money from her to follow Sonya Chotek here and marry her!

Gloria groaned aloud. Oh, what a fool she had made of herself! For deep in her heart she had always known that Stan truly didn't care about her. . . .

Perhaps if she had scorned him, laughed at him, he would be on his knees to her still! For that was the way with men: They wanted most what they couldn't have! . . . They spent their lives wishing for the moon. The fruit that hung highest on the tree . . . that was the fruit they craved. The woman who belonged to somebody else was the woman they desired above all other women!

. . . She had been too easy for Wayburn. She had always been at his beck and call, just as she was here now, this very minute!

"You coward!" she flared up at him. "All the time you were telling me how crazy you were about me you knew you were going to marry another woman! . . . Why, you're nothing but a crook!"

Wayburn's smile widened.

"And all the time you were letting me make love to you

you were married to another man!" he said. "You were doing a little double-crossing, yourself, I'd say!"

Gloria couldn't find a word to say. She knew that he was telling the truth . . . unvarnished, and unpleasant to listen to!

"The wonder to me is that Gregory ever married you," Wayburn went on. "I can't understand any man ever taking you seriously, Gloria. . . . I never did, you know. Not for a minute. I had the low-down on you right from the start."

"The low-down on me?" Gloria asked him. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I'd seen your kind of woman before. The world's full of them," Wayburn went on insolently. "Light-weights . . . that's the way men size you up! Dolls to play around with for a while. . . ."

Gloria picked up her hat and began to put it on. She didn't have to stay here to be insulted any longer.

Wayburn spoke again. "You're a member of the great sisterhood that takes everything and gives nothing in return," he said.

That stung Gloria to anger.

"You say that! You!" she cried. "What have I ever taken from you, I'd like to know! Nothing but a lot of applesauce!"

"I wasn't talking about myself. I was speaking of your husband," Wayburn said clearly. "You've never made him any decent return for what he's given you. Have you?"

"You're a great one to talk!" Gloria answered. "You were glad enough to ride around in the car he'd given me, weren't you? You didn't mind spoiling my life with him just for the fun of the thing, did you? . . . And now you have the nerve to pull this holier-than-thou stuff on me!—Oh, it's too funny. . . ."

Her voice rose shrilly on a high wave of hysteria. She laughed and laughed until she was weak. She lay limply in her chair, with her arms hanging at her sides. She was beyond tears, done for.

She heard the door of the room open. She looked up. Wayburn was going out. She stood up then and laid one hand on his arm. But he pulled away from her. "No," he said. The door closed on him.

Moments ticked by. After a while she pulled herself together, and got up to go.

Gloria had no feeling in her as she left Stanley Wayburn's boarding house. She was so terribly hurt that she was numb to her own pain.

She walked along block after block without knowing what she was doing. She stopped sometimes to look into shop windows—but only because she had always loved to do so.

It was after seven when she got back to her hotel. She walked past the open door of the dining-room. Her own room was dark.

Without turning on the lights, she flung herself down on the hard hotel bed. The best thing that could have happened would have been to cry herself to sleep. But she could neither cry nor sleep.

An hour passed. She got up and undressed. Her movements were slow, and she moved without a sound. She felt as if the person she loved had died, and that the body was in the next room. She must be very still. . . .

Toward morning she fell asleep.

When she awoke the sun was high.

Gloria lay in bed trying to make up her mind whether to go home or to go and hunt a job in New York.

She looked into the mirror. Her face showed no sign of the strain she had been through.

And Gloria was sure she had never been prettier in her whole life than she was that May morning, when she rang the doorbell of Kit Cameron's apartment in Fifty-ninth street.

Kit was having breakfast in bed. She was in black satin pajamas. A green ribbon banded her hair that was like black satin above her black eyes. Her smooth skin was the color of cream.

"Why, it's little Gloria Gordon!" she exclaimed, when the elderly maid led Gloria into the big, airy bedroom.

"Bring another cup and some fresh coffee for Miss Gordon, please, Elsie." Then she turned to Gloria.

"What in the world are you doing here?" she asked.

"Hunting a job," Gloria answered briefly.

"A job! What do you want with a job?" Kit asked in surprise. "I thought you'd married a millionaire back home."

"So did I," Gloria laughed. "But I got stung."

Kit took her hand sympathetically.

"Poor Gloria! You found out he didn't have one cent to rub up against another, I suppose," she said. "That's the

way with fellows, nowadays. . . . They all look as if they have a bank account, and a house-boat at Palm Beach. But there's nothing to most of them but a line of talk and a fur overcoat that ain't even paid for! . . . 'Buttons shoe boys' I call 'em!"

Gloria frowned a little. She didn't want Kit to think that Dick was that kind of a man. Buttons shoe boy, indeed!

"Oh, it wasn't the money that made the trouble, Kit," she said quickly. "We just didn't hit it off. . . . Don't get it into your head that I married him for nothing but money. I thought I was pretty keen about him at first."

Kit sighed, as she sugared her grapefruit.

"That's the way with love. It wears out too soon," she said. "A girl ought to marry for money."

"Only, it's so hard to find," she went on wistfully. "Most of these 'heavy-sugar papas' with real money are tied up to some hatchet-faced wife who's hanging on to 'em like grim death! . . . A girl has a hard time these days, especially in the show business."

The show business! Ah, now they were getting down to brass tacks!

"Kit," Gloria began, "I came to ask you to help me get a job on the stage. Do you suppose you could introduce me to Ginfeld?"

Kit widened her green eyes.

"Well, you sure have your nerve!" she said. "Ginfeld's girls are supposed to be the best-looking girls in the world!"

Gloria narrowed her eyes. Could it be that Kit didn't think she was pretty enough for a Ginfeld chorus girl?

"You used to say I was better looking than you, Kit," she said at last.

"I know. But I'm a type! Pure Spanish! Ginfeld says so," Kit said with pride. "And . . . aren't you getting the least bit too fat, dear?"

She looked across the room into the mirror above the dressing-table. She ran a hand down her own exquisite flatness. "I'll tell you what!" she said suddenly. "I'm going down to the shop for rehearsal in a little while. I'll take you along, Gloria. And if Ginfeld is there, I'll introduce you to him. That's the best I can do for you. . . . And after all, some girls spend years just trying to see Ginfeld."

Gloria was delighted.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE Gloria who walked into Hermann Ginfeld's office was sure of her own charm.

She was confident that Ginfeld would jump at the chance to put her in his chorus of beauties.

"Let's see," Ginfeld began. "You're the girl that Cameron told me about. Gloria Gordon?"

"Yes," Gloria answered, seating herself beside his desk.

"Stand up," he said sharply. Gloria stood.

Ginfeld leaned back, and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. He looked her over from head to foot.

"Take off your hat," he ordered.

Gloria took it off, and shook her head to fluff out her hair.

"Dance?" he asked. "Sing?"

"A little of both, thanks," Gloria answered. She knew that it was not dancing or singing, but her looks, that counted with Ginfeld!

She waited breathlessly while he clapped a brown derby hat on his bald head, and stood up. He looked at her indifferently.

"We're putting on a summer show pretty soon," he said, after a moment. "If we can use you in it, I'll let you know. . . . Thanks for coming in."

A summer show! A bum summer show! . . . Gloria could have wept with disappointment. Her heart was as heavy as a lump of lead.

She knew that she had not made a "hit" with Ginfeld!

She knew that she would never be in the famous "Gayeties" chorus! . . . That dream was smashed forever!

She was ashamed to go out into the dusty hallway and face Kit, who was waiting there for her.

"He didn't want me," she said hopelessly.

"Don't take it too hard, Gloria," Kit comforted her. "You just don't happen to be the type Ginfeld wants. Try the other managers."

For a week Gloria dragged herself up and down Broadway hunting for a job.

She went from one manager to another just as fast as she could go.

She started out with Bob Lingard, whose show, "Frills," was breaking all records on Broadway. And she ended with the manager of a cheap burlesque show on Fourteenth street.

It was the manager of the burlesque show who told her what was wrong with her.

"Now, listen, kid," he said to her, shoving his brown derby hat back on his head. "You're pretty but you ain't got nothin'! Some's tall and lean, some's short and fat—but they gotta have somethin'. You can't be just a cake o' ice, and get away with it in the show business!"

Gloria went away puzzled. What did the man mean . . . that she was a cake of ice? Perhaps he meant that she wasn't a type, like Kit Cameron . . . that she looked like any other pretty girl.

So she tried to look "different." She brushed all the wave out of her hair, and plucked her eyebrows, until they were only a thin black line.

But no one had a job for her. Her money was all gone. She sold her rings and her wrist-watch.

Every morning she would start out, with a prayer in her heart. And every night she would drag herself back to her hotel room . . . tired and dirty and discouraged, sick at heart.

. . . They said that Broadway was paved with broken hearts! Well, hers was one of them, Gloria told herself bitterly as the days went by.

Why couldn't she land a job, she wondered.

Wasn't she really as pretty as Dick had always said she was? Was he the only man in the world who could see her beauty?

To all these theatrical men was she just one more stage-struck girl?

. . . It began to look that way to Gloria.

She wondered if she dared go back to Dick, who loved her . . . Oh, what a fool she had been ever to leave him!

But would he take her back? Oh, would he?

She sat one night at her window looking down into the moth-brown twilight of West Eleventh street. She rubbed her face and neck with cold cream, to remove the grime of

New York from her soft white skin. She polished her nails.

Tears filled her eyes and ran down her cheeks, making little furrows in the cold cream on them. The sobs that she had been choking back for days, burst from her, suddenly.

"Oh, what am I going to do? What am I going to do?" she wailed over and over. Despair covered her like a cloak of darkness.

It was at that moment that the telephone rang.

Gloria sat up and looked at it, curiously.

Who could be calling her?—Stan Wayburn? Kit Cameron?—Probably only the hotel manager, to ask her why she didn't pay her bill! It was overdue. . . .

"Hello," she said wearily.

A man's deep voice answered her. "Bob Lingard speaking," he said briefly.

Bob Lingard! The producer of "Frills!" . . . Gloria's heart gave a wild leap.

She had left her telephone number with Lingard a week ago. But she had never expected to hear from him again. And now—this!

He wanted her to go out to dinner with him, to talk business, he said.

"To talk business! That means a job!" Gloria laughed to herself, as she left the telephone. She danced around the room for very lightness of heart.

She smiled joyously into her mirror as she dressed.

"Listen and don't say much . . . that's the way to make a hit with a man!" she knew. And she'd make a hit with Lingard that night if she never opened her mouth!

Gloria rubbed the tiniest bit of rouge on her cheeks, and dusted her nose with powder. She didn't want to look "made-up."

She had learned that the more fresh and natural a girl was, the more chance she had on Broadway. There were too many painted beauties there. They all looked alike. . . .

She was blooming like a half-opened rose when she met Lingard in the lobby of her little hotel at eight o'clock. She looked up at him shyly, and smiled her greeting.

Bob Lingard was a tall, heavy-set man with a bulldog jaw. His brown eyes bulged a little. In her secret soul, Gloria thought him repulsive.

But she did not flinch when he drew her arm through his. They stepped out into the warm May night.

Lingard's gray roadster was drawn up at the curb.

"Whither away?" he asked pleasantly.

"Anywhere! I don't care where we go," Gloria cried gayly, recklessly. She was too excited to care! Too excited to think!

She simply couldn't believe that this man beside her was the great Bob Lingard, whose name was known from one end of the country to the other! Surely it must be a dream.

"Well, then—we'll go to a place where we can have a private dining-room," Lingard said. "A place where we can talk. . . . I want to tell you about the new show I'm putting on next season, Miss Gordon."

He tucked her hand under his own on the driving wheel, as the gray car slid into motion.

Gloria's head whirled. A new show! Was Lingard going to give her a job in it? . . . It sounded that way.

She leaned back and drew a sigh of happiness. The night wind lifted the little curls that edged her forehead! She closed her eyes. . . . She did not see the queer, side-wise look that Lingard turned on her as she lay back against the soft leather cushion.

. . . Ah, this was something like it!—she thought.

To be rolling along in this purring car with a man who could give her a career!

She felt she was stepping into a new world. She sighed with the sudden joy of living. . . . This was the sunrise after the darkness of the last two weeks!

Gloria had never been in a private dining-room before in all her life.

"Queer little room," she murmured.

She felt unreal . . . as if she were part of a dream. As if the bright little room with its mirrors and its red carpet was the background of a dream.

But the food, when it came, was real enough. Gloria ate greedily. She was half-starved after her week of coffee and sandwiches.

The dinner came to an end at last. Lingard leaned back in his chair and stirred the highball the waiter had mixed for

him. He was silent. Gloria felt uneasy under his steady gaze.

She had never looked lovelier in her life than she did that night.

Her face was thinner . . . worn down to the last expression of its girlish comeliness by the misery of the last two weeks. And against the pearl of her skin, her mouth was like a red nasturtium.

Lingard leaned forward and took her hands, where they lay on the tablecloth, in his. He stroked the silky palms.

"You look like an old sweetheart of mine back in the little Ohio town where I grew up, Gloria Gordon," he said suddenly. "Ever since you came into my office the other day, I've been thinking about you. Your face has stuck in my mind for the last four or five days . . . and I see a lot of girls in four or five days."

There was a long pause. Then Lingard went on.

"This new show of mine is called 'Morning Glory,'" he said. "I want to get together a brand-new chorus for it . . . none of the girls that Broadway has seen before. I want new faces, faces fresh as morning glories, for it. . . ."

He stopped and lighted a thick cigar.

"I think that, with three months' training, I could make you into a pretty nifty chorus girl. But you'd have to work, and work hard!" he said. "How about it?"

Gloria was scarcely breathing. She trembled with excitement.

"I've made many an actress out of a nobody in my time," Lingard went on. "A good show and plenty of advertising will make any girl a star, overnight. All she needs is the looks . . . and you've got 'em, believe me! I could always fall for a redhead, kid!"

His voice grew suddenly thick. He got up from his chair. With the eyes of a dove that watches the approach of a serpent, Gloria watched Lingard come around the table toward her.

He put one of his big hands under her chin, tilting her face up towards him. Gloria struggled hard not to be afraid. After all, what could happen . . . ?

"I'm going to put you across as the livest chorus-girl in America," Lingard said. "How about it?"

It took all of Gloria's courage to smile up at him. But she did—ravishingly.

Lingard pulled her suddenly to her feet. He crushed her in his big arms. His mouth passed over her face, covering it with kisses.

Gloria tore herself away from him.

"Please don't, Mr. Lingard," she cried out. "You've no right to do that. . . ." She rubbed her lips with her handkerchief.

Lingard laughed. He moved toward her . . . towering.

"Too good to live, aren't you, honey?" he asked cheerfully. "That's what they all say! . . . What do you think the world's made of? What do you think I'm giving you a job in my best show for? For the joy of doing good in the world? You make me laugh!"

He seized her in his arms again, almost lifting her from her feet.

They struggled together, bumping against the table. Gloria made a wild sweep with her hand, and picked up Lingard's highball glass. She leaned back and dashed it in his face.

Instantly he let her go, his face dripping.

"You little fiend," he roared. "What are you trying to do?"

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face. His cheek was bleeding where the breaking glass had cut it.

He was out of breath, and furiously angry. But his eyes were puzzled. He couldn't understand Gloria's attack on him. His simple code was that you offered a service to the woman you fancied . . . and that she paid.

He rang the bell for the waiter. Then he walked over to the window.

"Get the lady a taxi," he said, without turning around.

As Gloria followed the waiter out to the street, she knew that her last chance to star on Broadway was gone, forever! She was utterly beaten. . . . But suddenly she didn't care. She wanted nothing but home . . . and Dick. They seemed a million miles away! Her own room! The sights she knew! Home!

CHAPTER XXXV

THE Gloria who unlocked the door of her own house a few days later was not the defiant young creature who had left it three weeks before.

The old Gloria would have come swinging up the steps, singing a bit of rag-time. This one crept into the house wearily. The grandfather's clock in the hall struck the hour as she came in.

Gloria looked up at it. She had learned a thing or two since she had last heard the striking of that clock!

She looked around the corner of the door into the living-room. There in his armchair sat Dick!

"I knew it was you," he said.

"Dick," Gloria said. "I've come home to you!"

She took no step toward him—only looked at him with unhappy eyes, wondering what he would do or say.

Dick gave a short laugh. "So I see," he said.

There was no warmth in his voice.

All the way home from New York, Gloria had longed for this moment. Her heart had sung an old nursery rhyme to the noise of the train . . .

"Home again, home again!
Jiggedy Jig!"

She had thought of home as safe harbor. She had wanted to throw herself on Dick's breast—to sob out all her heart-break and shame to him. For she was honestly ashamed of herself.

But Dick's coldness kept her away from him, against her own will. It was like a wall between them.

Her eyelids pricked. Her lips trembled. She had to press her handkerchief hard against them to stifle a sob.

Dick looked at her. She had taken off her dusty hat, and her hair shone like a copper helmet.

But neither Gloria's beauty nor her misery could touch Dick at that moment, or move him to pity.

"Come here a minute!" he said.

Gloria moved slowly into the room. She thought that he meant to take her in his arms, to tell her that he forgave her.

But he waved her into a little chintz-covered chair that stood across the hearth from him. Gloria sank into it.

"Oh, Dick, don't look at me as if you could murder me!" she pleaded. "Don't be mean to me! You wouldn't if you knew all I've been through."

Her sobs broke out afresh.

"Why, what happened to you? . . . Did Wayburn throw you down?" Dick asked coldly.

Gloria knew that Dick wouldn't take her back if she told him the truth. So she lied.

"You thought I'd gone to New York to be with Stan?" she asked. "No, indeed. Although I did see him. . . ."

"Sure you saw him!" Dick broke in. "Sure you saw him! You know you followed him to New York. And I know it! So what's the use of lying? Stick to the truth!" His fist came down hard on the arm of his chair.

Gloria started. All right, she thought, she would tell him the truth! She'd let him have it, if that was what he wanted. She told him almost all of it.

Her voice was low and flat, almost without feeling. Dick knew that what she was telling him was the ugly truth. Drop by drop she drank her misery.

She began with her visit to Wayburn's rooms. She ended with the story of her struggle with Lingard in the private dining-room where she had gone with him.

Dick clenched his hands.

"You! Going to such a place with a man like Lingard!" he said. "Letting him look you over, to see if you'd do for a chorus-girl in his cursed show. . . . You! My wife!"

He groaned.

"Well, I'll say this for Lingard—he was crazy about my looks," Gloria told him complacently. "And he was very nice at first. But when he got fresh . . . well, I just smashed a glass right in his face! I never was so frightened in all my born days . . ." She shivered. Her little shoulders shook.

At that Dick rose and went to her. She laid her head on his breast. "Don't hate me," she begged.

But he turned away.

"Run upstairs and wash your face while I make some coffee for you," he said gruffly.

"Why can't Ranghild make it? What are you paying her for?" she asked.

"Ranghild left a week ago," Dick answered. "I figured that you were gone for good, you see. And besides, we can't afford a housemaid any more. . . . You just won't get it into your head that we're poor, will you, Gloria?"

From the doorway, Gloria stared at him. Then she flung him three words:

"Still talking money!" she said, contemptuously.

She picked up her bag and went upstairs. At the top of the flight she paused.

On one side of the hall was the double room that she and Dick had shared until his illness. On the other was the "spare" bedroom. Her toilet things and cushions were still in it.

Gloria hesitated for a long moment. Then she went quickly into the room that had been Dick's and hers. She bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, and went downstairs to have her coffee.

She left her bag, standing open, on one of the twin beds.

Two hours later when she came upstairs again, the bag was gone. Gloria looked all around the room for it.

Then she crossed the hall into the guest-room. There the bag stood! On the floor beside the single bed! Dick must have put it there. . . .

"All right," Gloria shrugged her shoulders. "If that's the way he feels about me, I should worry!"

But she did worry! Hurt and humiliated, she bolted the door of the room.

An hour later, she heard Dick come upstairs. The door on the other side of the hall closed softly.

In the lonely quiet of the room that had been Gloria's and his, Dick Gregory faced his problem that night.

Above all other living things, he loved the woman who lay asleep in the room across the hall. He wanted to take her back, and he was afraid to do it.

He was afraid to trust his happiness to Gloria again!

He had been beside himself for the last week, since the day when he had come home to find her gone . . .

He had felt sure that she had left him for Stanley Wayburn. Gloria's story bore out his fears, in part. He wondered though—and his nails bit deep into his palms at the thought—if she had told him the whole truth.

Could he believe her? Dick didn't know whether he could or not. Gloria had lied to him so many times before—

And suppose she "got tired of sticking around the house" again, and ran away? What then? . . .

Dick shook his head. He was in a torment of doubt.

The door behind him swung slowly open.

Before he turned to look Dick knew that Gloria stood there. His senses knew her.

She stood there in her white nightgown. Her naked feet, spread to the floor, showed white and slim. She was like some lovely lily rising superbly on a slender stem.

"Dick"—she gave a little smothered cry—"don't hate me! Don't treat me like this. . . . I can't stand it!"

She rushed to him and laid her head down on his knees, crying noisily like a child.

"This isn't the way to hold me," she said, drawing a long sobbing breath, "by keeping yourself away from me . . . and treating me like an outcast!"

"I'm not trying to hold you, Gloria," Dick said quietly. "You can go to-morrow, if you like."

Gloria looked up at him. Surprise filled her eyes.

"Don't you love me any more? Don't you want me to live with you any more?" she asked.

Dick slowly shook his head.

"Not unless you're ready to settle down," he said firmly. "If you stay here, you'll have to stay on my terms this time! You'll have to cut out running around with May Seymour on these drinking parties. And you'll have to knuckle down and do your own housework. I can't afford help for you. Just look here a minute. . . ."

He got up and took a thick sheaf of envelopes from the spinet desk that stood between the front windows.

"All these are bills," Dick said. "We're months behind with them. All my savings are gone. The house is mortgaged right up to the hilt. . . . And I wouldn't mind this, Gloria, if you'd been happy spending the money. But you haven't been!"

He flung the bills back on the desk.

"The more money you've spent the more discontented you've been," Dick went on. "Now you're going to try my way of living for a change! I want you to live like other poor men's wives . . . help me to get along. Are you ready to try it?"

Gloria looked up at him with eyes that shone under the ruddy fluff of her hair.

"Oh, I am! I will try to be a real wife to you, Dick!" she cried. And at that moment she meant what she said. Besides, she knew, that sooner or later, she could coax Dick into getting Ranghild back again to work for her. . . .

She put her arms on Dick's shoulders. This time he did not turn away. All around him was the heavy scent of her perfumed hair. Her arms were warm and soft, and they clung as if they never would let him go.

Gloria closed her eyes, and his hold tightened. It was as if the wall that Dick had raised against her and her beauty crumpled and fell. He bent down to her lips.

They parted, suddenly, to speak . . . those scarlet lips.

"I forgot to tell you," Gloria murmured dreamily, "that Stanley Wayburn is married. . . . He married a Russian actress."

Dick's hold of her loosened. He waited with every nerve tense, for her to go on.

"He married her just the day before I got to New York," she said. "So you see I couldn't have left you just on account of him . . . as you thought I had. See?"

Dick saw. He saw too well . . . too clearly.

"So that's why you came home!" he said. "So that's why! Because Wayburn married some one else. If he hadn't you'd be in New York this minute! . . . Of course, I see! I see perfectly!"

He flung himself away from Gloria. She stood looking at him helplessly.

"I would have come home anyhow," she defended herself. "I hate Stanley Wayburn. I hate him . . . now."

"Sure, and that's why you've come home to me!" Dick answered. "Don't stand there and try to kid me any more. I've got your number. . . . Go back to bed!"

The next morning Gloria was awakened by a loud knocking on the door of her room.

"Ye-es," she called in a thick sleepy voice. She had been dreaming that she was still in the lonely hotel room in New York.

Then she heard Dick's voice.

"Better get up, Gloria," he was saying. "There's no Rangel to bring you breakfast this morning, you know."

Gloria didn't answer at once. The door was not locked. . . . Why didn't Dick come in to say "hello" to her?

Oh, all right, she made up her mind suddenly, if he wanted to keep her at arm's length, she'd help him out!

"Thanks, I'll get up when I feel like it!" she said. But the old snap and spirit had gone out of her voice.

There was silence for a few seconds, then the soft pad-pad of Dick's feet going down the stairs.

Before he had reached the bottom Gloria was out of bed on her bare feet.

Dick looked up in surprise as she ran down into the hall.

"I think you might have been a sport and made some coffee for me," she said to him.

"Do you?" Dick asked politely. There was no color in his voice. He picked up his brief-case from the table in the living-room.

"Yes, I do," Gloria cried. "I think it's mean of you to treat me like a red-headed stepchild when I've come back and told you I'm sorry. Do you know you haven't spoken a kind word to me since the night I showed you Stan Wayburn's letter? . . . I suppose you never had a letter from a woman in your life! I suppose you never did anything you're ashamed of! You're so darned pure!"

Woman-like she seized upon the half-forgotten letter incident as a peg to hang all her discontent upon, now.

Dick didn't answer. He crossed the room to his old writing-desk . . . the only bit of furniture that he had brought with him from his old home.

He took from it a bundle of letters and photographs, and tossed them down on the table without a word. There was a queer cold smile on his face . . . as he went out.

The front door banged. In the stillness that settled down over the house, Gloria could almost hear her heart beating.

Did Dick mean that she was to look at the letters? Was there an answer to her question in them? Was that what the smile on Dick's face had meant?

She picked them up, and loosed the rubber bands that held them together.

The letter that lay on the top of the pile was the one she read first. It was written in blue ink on dull blue paper, and it smelled faintly of violets.

"Dick dearest," it said, "I am sick of tearing up the letters that I write to you. I am tired of pretending—and so I am going to tell the truth to you. I love you. Dick, I love you. It is hard for me to write this letter. . . . Lucie."

"Lucie" had not found it so hard to write the half dozen letters that followed, it seemed. Some of them were ten pages long. And all of them were signed with "Love and kisses from Lucie." That seemed to be her stock phrase.

Under "Lucie's" love notes was another package of letters. These were all from a woman who signed herself "Roxie." Roxie's letters were passionate, to say the least.

"She must have been reading Elinor Glyn," said Gloria to herself, with amusement. To think of good old Dick having a love affair with a woman like Roxie! . . . Gloria giggled inwardly.

But her laughter died when she came to the photographs that had been tied up with the letters.

One was a picture of a lovely blond with bobbed hair.

Bobbed hair! Then Dick must have known her within the last few years, since bobbed heads had become the fashion!

The other picture was an enlarged snapshot of Dick and a tall, sweet-faced brunette. Both of them were in white sports clothes and carried tennis racquets. Dick had his arm across the shoulders of the girl. At the bottom was written, "Gilchrist's house party, June, 1923."

Only two years ago!

"Well!" Gloria said to herself, a little out of breath, "what do you know about that!"

She wondered if the girl in the snapshot were "Roxie" or "Lucie."

She read the letters again—as if, perhaps, they might yield up their secret the second time. But she was just as puzzled as before.

She pondered all morning as she went around the house with

a silly feather duster that only stirred up the dust in the rooms instead of clearing it away.

A dozen times she came back to the living-room table to look at those two pictures. She wasn't worried about the "Roxie" letters . . . but the girl who had written the "Lucie" letters had evidently cared deeply for Dick.

Had he cared for her, Gloria wondered?

She couldn't think of Dick caring for any woman save herself. She couldn't bear the thought of his holding another woman in his arms and telling her that he loved her. . . . And yet, of course, he had! He must have! Not only one but two women. Otherwise they would never have written him all these love letters . . . They wouldn't have dared.

She took the letters with her out into the kitchen, and read them again while she ate the cold canned salmon that was all the lunch she had. She propped the two photographs up against the mirror of her dressing-table while she dressed late in the afternoon.

She had never thought of any other women being in Dick's life, before she met him. And yet there must have been, of course. . . . But he had been so madly in love with her from that first night when he had kissed her that she had never dreamed of any other women . . . the thought had never worried her at all. It had not even ruffled her vanity.

While she sat there brushing her hair, the telephone rang.

"Hello, Gloria." It was Dick's voice. "Are we going to have dinner at home to-night?"

Gloria gasped. "Who's going to cook it?"

"Why don't you make a stab at it?" Dick asked. "No time like the present, you know."

"Oh, no," Gloria objected. "I couldn't. And besides, there's not a thing in the house."

"All right, suit yourself," Dick's voice was remotely polite. "I'll eat downtown then, if you don't mind. Good-by."

But Gloria did mind. She minded very much. . . . There was nothing she enjoyed more than having a meal downtown. And Dick knew it!

Gloria stamped her foot. What did Dick think she was, anyway? Some kind of a doormat that he could trample on?

Did he think that he could have a fine meal downtown, with a waiter hovering over him, while she sat alone at home and

ate a couple of sandwiches? . . . Did he really think she'd let him get away with it?

Well, she'd show him where to head in! . . . She would get dressed this very minute, and march straight downtown to his office! She would go out to supper with him or know the reason why. . . .

“ ‘Mama goes where papa goes,
Or papa don't go out to-night,’ ”

sang Gloria at the top of her voice, as she turned on the faucets in the bathtub. Then she remembered that the song was Stanley Wayburn's favorite ballad. She stopped singing.

She wanted never to think of Stan Wayburn again, so long as she lived!

For the last six months Gloria had thought that she was in love with Stan. There had been something in him that called to her . . . his devil-may-care quality, his everlasting cheerfulness.

But when she found out that he didn't love her, it had not broken her heart. It hadn't even touched her heart! . . . It had hurt only her pride. That was the thing that cowered in her, ashamed . . . the thing that wouldn't lift its head. Her pride in herself. Her vanity.

CHAPTER XXXVI

At six o'clock Gloria was on her way to Dick's office.

It was the first white hour of the twilight, but the hall within the building was dark.

There was a light in Dick's office. Gloria could see it through the frosted glass pane of the door. But the door, itself, was locked. Strange, she thought.

She knocked. She knocked again. There was no answer.

"Oh, bother!" Gloria said, exasperated. "I've missed him, He's gone!"

But Dick had left a light burning in his office. That must mean that he was coming back there to work, after he had had his supper.

Suddenly Gloria made up her mind to telephone Miss Briggs.

Miss Briggs would be able to tell her where Dick usually ate when he was downtown. And then she would hunt Dick up. . . . She hated to eat alone. And besides, she wanted to ask Dick who the "Lucie" of the letters was! She couldn't draw a peaceful breath until she knew that!

She went into a cigar store and looked up Miss Briggs' telephone number. She called it.

A woman with quavering old voice answered the phone. Miss Briggs wasn't at home, she said.

"This is Mrs. Briggs . . . Miss Briggs' mother," the old voice went on. "I think Susy's working late. You could probably get her at the office. . . . Who is this talking, please?"

But Gloria had hung up.

She stood silent as a statue in the telephone booth.

Was Dick having supper somewhere with Susan Briggs? . . . Her first suspicion of him flicked her brain for an instant. Then it was gone. . . .

Oh, no . . . not Dick! He wasn't the kind of a man who made dates with his secretary! He wouldn't do such a thing. . . . She put the thought aside.

Gloria was very hungry.

There was a little restaurant near by where the food was delicious. She made up her mind to go there for a bite. Then, afterward, she would run up to Dick's office and surprise him at his work.

On her way, Gloria bought a movie magazine. She looked through it, sitting at a corner table of the cozy restaurant with its shaded lamps and smell of savory food.

The waiter brought her soup . . . mock turtle soup, thick and steaming. Gloria ate it hungrily. She sat back and looked around her, as she buttered a hot muffin.

She was the only person in the room who was alone.

At the other tables were little groups of two or three. Two, for the most part . . . the eternal duo of a man and a woman.

"You can always tell the married couples from the ones that aren't married," Gloria giggled to herself. "The married ones usually have a newspaper to read. They never talk, and they're always glum!"

Then her eye was caught by the familiar look of a man who sat with his back toward her, in the farthest corner of the restaurant. There was something about him that made her think of Dick. . . . It was Dick!

Gloria stood up to go to him.

It wasn't until then that she saw that Dick was not alone.

Across the table from him sat a woman. A woman with blue, shining eyes and a mouth which might have been too large if it had not been so fine and firm . . . Susan Briggs!

Gloria stared at them. Miss Briggs raised her eyes and saw her, standing there. She leaned across the table and spoke to Dick.

Gloria's first impulse was to laugh when she saw Miss Briggs and Dick at that half-hidden table in the corner of the little restaurant.

It was certainly the best laugh of the year—to catch the strait-laced Dick out "stepping" on the sly! To catch him taking his secretary out to dinner without telling his wife about it! . . . It was too funny. The corners of Gloria's mouth went up in a malicious little smile.

Then Dick turned and saw her. And something in his eyes startled her with its intensity. What had he and Miss Briggs been talking about to make him look like that? Could it be that he was in love with her, after all?

All the laughter died on Gloria's lips at the thought. Was

she going to play second fiddle to Miss Briggs in Dick's life? Was she going to be one of the great army of wives whose husbands are in love with their office girls? . . . Well, she just guessed not! Not so you could notice it!

With fury in her heart, Gloria marched forward to the table where Dick was sitting with Miss Briggs. He jumped up and pulled out a chair for her.

"Well, this is a surprise!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—I noticed you looked surprised when you saw me," Gloria answered with sarcasm that bit.

Without a word of greeting to Susan Briggs, she sat down at the table.

"Have the waiter bring the rest of my dinner over here," she commanded Dick. "Unless you have something to say to Miss Briggs that you'd rather not have your wife hear."

She laughed unpleasantly. She took out her vanity case and dabbed a bit of rouge on either cheek. Then she raised her eyes to Miss Briggs.

"You don't have to wear rouge, do you?" she asked. "You're as red as a beet. You look as if you have a fever, right now!"

It was true. Poor Miss Briggs had flushed to a deep, unbecoming red under Gloria's words.

She looked as if she wished that the earth would open and swallow her up. And, as a matter of fact, Miss Briggs was devoutly wishing herself out of that little restaurant.

She had come there that night alone, when Dick had asked her to work late. Five minutes after she had begun to eat, Dick, himself, had walked in. It would have been queer if he had not sat down to share her lonely meal. A friend could do no less, could he?

Miss Briggs wished now that Dick would explain the whole thing to his wife. But she knew he wouldn't. She could see that he was going to let Gloria think anything she wanted to think.

And what Gloria evidently thought was that Dick had taken Miss Briggs out to dinner . . . to "show her a good time."

Miss Briggs drew a breath of relief when Gloria turned her shoulder upon her, and began to talk to Dick.

"By the way, dear," she said with sugary sweetness, "I forgot to ask you if your mother's better. Did her trip with you do her good?"

"She's much better," Dick answered. He was puzzled. He knew that the very last person on earth that Gloria cared to hear about was his mother. He knew that Gloria detested his mother. . . . What game was his wife up to, now, he wondered.

He soon found out. Gloria went on talking to him about things that didn't matter to her or to him, either. She kept up a flow of foolish chatter. She spun it out until the meal was almost over.

She did her best to shut Miss Briggs out of the talk. She snubbed her. She talked in a half-whisper so low that Miss Briggs couldn't have caught a word if she had tried.

Dick saw the rude and cruel thing that Gloria was doing and he came to Miss Briggs' rescue just as he would have rescued a mouse that a cat was torturing.

He leaned across the table toward her. Deliberately he tried to draw her into the conversation.

"What did Smithers want to see me about to-day, Susy?" he asked gently.

"About that Parmely injunction case," Miss Briggs answered with lips that trembled. She fumbled in her purse and pulled out a \$2 bill. She laid it on the tablecloth.

"That's to pay for my dinner," she said, "and I think I'll leave you people now, and get back to my work. . . . Good night, Mrs. Gregory."

It cost Miss Briggs an effort to bid Gloria good night. And Gloria knew it.

"Good night, Miss Briggs," she said airily.

She smiled, with narrowed eyes. She knew she had spoiled Miss Briggs' dinner. And she was glad of it! She'd show Dick's secretary that she couldn't go dining around with him, and get away with it! She'd show her a trick or two worth knowing!

Miss Briggs got up to go. Dick rose with her.

"I wish you wouldn't rush off like this, Susy," he said. "See you later, though. Get together the data on that injunction case, will you?"

Wordlessly Miss Briggs nodded. She walked out of the little restaurant, jerkily, as if she were pulled by unseen wires.

Gloria watched her go, with an amused smile. Then she turned furiously to Dick.

"So!" she cried. "This is why you didn't want me to come

downtown to eat with you! This is why you don't want to kiss me any more! . . . I see it all, now! How long has this affair with Miss Briggs been going on, for goodness' sake?"

"Affair with Miss Briggs?" Dick repeated quietly. "I don't know what you're talking about. Do you know, yourself?"

Gloria stared at him.

"Do you mean to say you don't know Susan Briggs is cuckoo about you?" she asked. It would be just like Dick not to be able to see it!

"You ought to know it!" she went on. "She doesn't take the trouble to hide the fact that she's gone on you. You've only got to look at her to know!"

At that the smoldering anger in Dick burst out. He brought his fist down noiselessly on the thickly padded tablecloth.

"You ought to be ashamed of talking about a decent girl that way, Gloria," he said. "And the way you treated her just now was about the rottenest thing I ever saw. . . ."

"What do I care?" Gloria cried wildly. "Who's Susan Briggs that I should bow and scrape to her! She needn't think she can go jazzing around with my husband, and have me treat her like a tin angel!"

Dick looked at her from under his lowered brows.

"You think I'm 'jazzing around' with Susan Briggs?" he asked shortly.

"Sure I do!" Gloria's tone was airy.

"You know I'm not," Dick said quietly. "You know I'm not the kind of man who chases women. You know I run away from them. If I'd known Susan Briggs was coming here to-night, I'd have gone elsewhere. And you know that, too!"

Gloria gave a short, ugly laugh.

"You can bet your boots she knew you were coming here, though!" she said. "I'll bet she even knows where you go to get shaved, and where you buy your collars . . . everything about you! She makes a study of you. . . . And she came here to-night, knowing that you'd show up if she just waited long enough. And sure enough, you did!"

"I hardly ever eat here," Dick answered. "So she couldn't have guessed I was coming here, in a month of Sundays. Come on, let's go! I've had enough of this!—Do you want to come back to the office with me, or are you going home?"

"I'm not going back to the office," Gloria answered shortly. And left him.

CHAPTER XXXVII

GLORIA didn't want to go home. After Dick had left her she walked slowly along the street, looking into the shop windows and the lighted lobbies of the moving picture theaters.

Suddenly she saw two faces that she knew in the moving throng around her . . . little blond Mrs. Wing and Gretchen Geist. The two were chums. Gloria had played cards with them dozens of times. They had been at her house for lunch, often.

And now she smiled at them in greeting. But the smile froze on her lips.

For both women looked her full in the face for a moment. Neither spoke. Then they looked sharply away. And the coldness in their eyes was like a slap across Gloria's face. She smarted under it.

She stood quivering for a long moment. Here was a new problem!

These women must have heard the story of her love affair with Stanley Wayburn . . . these women who had been her good friends. Oh, she couldn't lose them! They were the people with whom she would have to live her life, now that she had come back to Dick!

As a drowning man clutches at a straw, Gloria's thoughts turned to Mother Gregory. She would have to go to Dick's mother and ask her to stand by her. As long as Dick's own mother was her friend, no one would dare to believe the story that she had left Dick for Stanley Wayburn!

Gloria looked at the clock in a jewelry store. Half past nine. Too late to see Mother Gregory to-night. . . . She would go to her first thing in the morning, though.

In the meantime, she could telephone May Seymour. May would be sure to know whatever gossip was "out" about her. May was a born news pad.

There were scores of people in this town of ours who "knew for a fact" that Gloria Gregory had left her husband, and

had run away with a Broadway actor named Stanley Wayburn.

No one knew where the nasty bit of gossip had started. But it flew all over town on the wings of the wind.

Gloria's card club heard it, and voted Gloria out of the club.

Lola Hough heard it and said it wasn't true. She defended Gloria.

May Seymour heard it and said she didn't blame Gloria for going. May, herself, would have been glad to escape to New York for a few weeks. For the gossips were busy with her and Jim Carewe again.

"Sure they've been talking about you," she told Gloria cheerfully that night on the telephone. "They say you ran away with Wayburn, and that Dick went down to New York and brought you home."

Gloria sighed dismally.

"What a tale!" she said. "If they must talk, why don't they get things straight?"

"Didn't you run away with Stanley Wayburn?" There was surprise in May's voice. She, too, believed the story of Gloria's desertion of Dick.

"Of course not! Don't be silly!" Gloria said sharply. "I went down to New York to go on the stage. I didn't even see Stan Wayburn!"

"That was a lie," she told herself bluntly, as she left the telephone, and began to undress, "but it's my story and I'm going to stick to it!"

She would never let any one know that she had followed Wayburn to New York and that he had turned her down! She could never raise her head again and look people in the eye, if they found that out!

Gloria tiptoed out into the hall and half way down the stairs. She thought she heard the sound of Dick closing the door. But no one was in the lower hall. The clock there struck twelve slowly and booming.

Where was Dick? Why didn't he come? . . . Surely he and Miss Briggs couldn't be working until midnight—

Suddenly as Gloria stood there on the stairs, she was afraid.

The empty house seemed to be filled with strange sounds and rustlings. The pantry door creaked . . . And was something or somebody moving in the dark dining-room?

With her heart in her mouth, Gloria dashed back upstairs to her room. She slammed and bolted the door behind her.

The lights in her room were blazing. Without stopping to turn them off, she plunged into bed and pulled the covers up over her head like a frightened child.

She lay trembling for long minutes, listening for the sound of Dick's key in the lock. . . . Where in the world was he at this hour of the night? Why didn't he come home? He had no right to leave his wife alone in the house half the night while he was out, doing . . . what? That was the question!

Surely he and Miss Briggs weren't still working in Dick's office? Where were they? Together, somewhere? . . . The questions swarmed like bees in Gloria's brain. She forgot her fear. Anger toward Dick took its place.

She swung her feet over the side of the bed and stepped out onto the rug. Then she put her head out of one of the open windows and looked up and down the street. But it lay empty and still under the hushed calm of midnight.

As Gloria stood there, she heard a sound in the house, itself! It came from downstairs . . . the harsh tinkle of metal against metal. Some one was at the silver in the sideboard drawers! Burglars!

Gloria pressed one hand tight to her breast! She felt as if her heart were jumping out of her body . . . it beat so fast! She tiptoed across the room to the door that led into the hall. She put her ear against it and listened for a long time. But there was no further sound.

Gloria began to wonder if she really had heard a noise, downstairs or not? Perhaps her tired brain had been playing her tricks. . . .

Well, as soon as Dick came she would find out if any one had been in the house. She wouldn't be afraid to go downstairs to the dining-room then. But why didn't he come?

Gloria got back into bed, and lay waiting for him. Oh, but wouldn't she pan him when he did get home, though! The very idea! Leaving her alone as if she were Lola Hough, or any other faded, middle-aged wife!

She'd let him know she wasn't going to be treated like this. . . . She'd leave him first! That's what she'd do. She had done it once, and she'd do it again! . . .

The next thing Gloria knew it was morning. Her room was

filled with the warmth and sunshine of early June. Through the open windows came the sound of a neighbor's lawn-mower and the sweet smell of fresh-cut grass.

Gloria smiled and stretched herself like a tiger-kitten. Then she remembered last night. She frowned.

Softly she went out into the hall and listened at Dick's door. No sound within! She opened the door and peeked into the room.

The bed had been slept in. Dick's pajamas lay on the rug beside it, where he had stepped out of them. There were ashes in the tray on the bedside table. He had been home part of the night at least. . . . And he had gone that morning without even saying good-by!

Gloria closed the door of his room.

"I'll be jiggered if I make his bed or clean up the place!" she said to herself. "He can't treat me like a servant and expect I'll be one for him! Because I won't!"

While she was waiting for her tub to fill, she went downstairs to the dining-room. The drawers of the sideboard were piled one on top of each other on the floor. They were empty.

So there had been burglars in the house last night! And they had taken every piece of the flat silver that had been Mother Gregory's wedding present! Not so much as a spoon was left!

Gloria shivered. Then it was the burglar she had heard taking the silver out of the sideboard drawers! . . . And it must have been the burglar whom she had seen moving stealthily against the darkness of the dining-room, last night! He must have been in the house when she entered it alone!

Why, she might have been shot, if she hadn't run upstairs when she did!

Gloria burst into tears of panic at the terrible thought.

. . . Well, she'd stand no more of Dick's neglect. The very idea of his sending her home alone at nine o'clock at night to a dark house! And then leaving her alone in it until 'way past midnight! She bet she'd never let him do a stunt like that again to her. . . .

She bathed and dressed. She didn't stop to dust or make beds.

But, leaving the house just as it was, Gloria closed the door of it behind her, and started out. She was going to see

Mother Gregory! She'd let her know whose fault it was that Dick's marriage was a fizzle!

She was through talking to Dick . . . through pleading with him to treat her decently, Gloria told herself.

But she knew she was only trying to bolster up her vanity. Under all her bravado, she knew that the fact of the matter was that Dick was through with her! . . . She had seen it in his eyes the night she had come home from New York. She had heard it in the indifferent tone he used when he talked to her. And his indifference was maddening her. She couldn't stand it!

She had always had love and indulgence from Dick. He had treated her like a beautiful, spoiled little girl. And now he hardly looked at her.

Gloria's heart was heavy as she rang the doorbell of the old Gregory homestead. Maggie opened the door for her.

She found Mother Gregory eating her substantial breakfast of ham and eggs, rolls and coffee. Her face was flushed with too much food.

"Well, Gloria!" she cried in her rich, full voice. She got up from the table.

She put her well-rounded arms about Gloria and gave her a peck on either cheek.

"Come upstairs and talk to me while I get dressed," she said, steering Gloria out of the dining-room.

She nodded her head in the direction of Maggie, who was listening with all her might.

"We'll talk up here where Maggie can't hear every word we say," she told Gloria in a stage whisper as they mounted the wide staircase. "What did you come to see me about, Gloria?"

She knew that this was no friendly call the girl was making. She knew that Gloria didn't like her any more than she, herself, liked Gloria. She was sure that Gloria had come on a special errand.

The girl curled herself up in a little ball on the hard leather window seat in Mother Gregory's room. It was a room as plain as the woman who slept in it . . . a woman who scorned silk underwear and make-up as only Mother Gregory could scorn them! There were no cushions in that room, no ruffled curtains, no dressing-table laden with perfume and powder boxes.

Mother Gregory stood before the walnut dresser and began to hook herself into an elaborate black dress, made in a style that had been popular when Dick was a baby!

"What did you come to see me about, Gloria?" she asked again.

"We-ll," Gloria began, "last night we were robbed of every bit of that lovely flat silver you gave us for a wedding present! Some one broke into the house."

Mother Gregory threw up her plump hands.

"My stars! . . . Dick's reported it to the police, of course?" she said. "Why, that silver has been in the family for a hundred years!"

Slowly Gloria shook her pretty head.

"No, Dick hasn't reported it to the police. Dick doesn't know anything about the burglary," she said calmly.

Mother Gregory looked at her with her sharp black eyes.

"You see," Gloria went on without flickering an eyelash, "it all happened in the middle of the night when Dick wasn't at home."

"When Dick wasn't at home!" Mother Gregory echoed in a loud, surprised tone. "Well, where on earth was he at that time of night, then?"

"That's what I want to know," Gloria answered. "But I have every reason to think that he was with Miss Briggs."

The words exploded like a bomb in the quiet room.

"With Susan Briggs!" Mother Gregory repeated. "With Susan Briggs! Oh, no, Gloria!"

Gloria shrugged her shoulders.

"Have it your own way," she said. "But I know that I found them having dinner together on the quiet, last night. I left them at nine o'clock. They said they were going to work for a while at the office. And at one o'clock when I fell asleep, Dick hadn't come home!"

Mother Gregory all but fell into a chair that stood opposite Gloria. Her eyes were wide, and her mouth stood open with surprise.

"I can't believe it!" she cried at last. "And how do you know when the burglar was in the house?"

"I heard him," Gloria answered. "I thought I heard Dick come in and I ran downstairs. Then I saw some one in the dining-room and I rushed back to my room and locked myself up. . . . I was scared to death!"

"You couldn't have been so terribly frightened," Mother Gregory mused, "or you wouldn't have dropped quietly off to sleep at one o'clock, as you said you did."

At that Gloria flared up.

"Well, I'll tell you just how frightened I was, if you want to know, Madam Gregory!" she said, furiously. "I was so frightened that I'll never stay alone in that house again, after dark! . . . And if your son wants to have a love affair with his office girl he'll have to work at it daytimes!"

"Glo-ree-a!" exclaimed Mother Gregory in the severe tones of the vice president of the Home Women's Club. "You're vulgar!"

"Vulgar nothing! I'm just telling you the truth about your beautiful son!" Gloria sneered. "When I married him I thought he was a plaster saint, too! But I've found out all about him. . . . Look at those!"

She pulled some of the "Roxie" and "Lucie" love letters and pictures from her handbag and threw them into Mother Gregory's lap.

Dick's mother laughed her comfortable deep laugh, as she picked them up.

"Roxie and Lucie Gilchrist!" she cried. "They were both in love with Dick. First Roxie was—and then Lucie. They're both married now, though. And Lucie has a baby! . . . Dick had a lot of girls in his day, Gloria. But that doesn't prove that he isn't what you call a 'plaster saint'!"

Gloria's lip curled.

"All right," she said. "But you can't explain his staying out most of last night with Susan Briggs!"

"I don't believe for a single second that Dick was out half the night with Sue Briggs or any other woman!" Mother Gregory said with spirit. "I'd have to see that with my own eyes to believe it!"

"Well, then, where was he until two or three o'clock last night?—No place where he had any business to be!" Gloria cried. "He certainly wasn't working until then! . . . Don't try to tell me that!"

Mother Gregory's fine black eyes flashed.

"Why don't you ask him where he was?" she asked quietly. Gloria laughed unpleasantly.

"That's just it! He didn't give me a chance to ask him

anything!" she answered. "He sneaked away this morning before I woke up."

"My poor child," Mother Gregory's voice was soft with sudden pity. "Can't you trust your husband out of your sight? Don't you know by this time what sort of man Dick is?"

Gloria shook her head.

"I certainly don't!" she said. "I thought I did once. But Dick's changed so, lately. He's getting to be a regular crossword puzzle. I can't make him out. What do you suppose he did the night I came home from New York?"

"Tell me."

"He put me out of our room!" Gloria said. "He moved all my things into the spare room. He doesn't want me for his wife any more, I suppose. And that was his gentle way of breaking the news to me."

Mother Gregory knitted her brows. This was more serious than she had supposed—this breach between Gloria and Dick.

"My dear," she said. "How did you happen to go to New York in the first place? There's a story around town that you went there with that actor of yours . . . What was his name? Westfield? Wakefield?"

"Wayburn," Gloria helped her out. "But I didn't go to New York with him. He went two weeks before I did."

"But did you go because he was there?" Mother Gregory asked.

Gloria was all ready to say "No." But she had a feeling that Mother Gregory's eyes could see right down into her very soul!

"Yes," she whispered. Her lips quivered.

Mother Gregory sat down heavily on the edge of her great four-poster bed. The springs creaked under her weight.

"A-ah!" she said, "and then you expect Dick to take you back with open arms when you've shown him you love another man?"

"I don't love Stan Wayburn," Gloria answered sullenly.

"You don't love Dick, that's sure!" Dick's mother said.

"And he doesn't love me!" Gloria came back at her. "If he did he wouldn't leave me alone in the house all night to be frightened to death! . . . He doesn't care a darn for me any more!"

"I hope he doesn't, Gloria," Mother Gregory said solemnly.

"I'd hate his marriage to wind up the way poor John Seymour's did, last night."

"Dr. John!" Gloria cried. "Why, what's happened to Dr. John?"

A curious, cold fear seemed to take hold of her heart . . . to squeeze it. She could hardly breathe. Mother Gregory's voice seemed to come from a long way off, when she spoke again.

"Didn't you see the morning paper?" she asked.

With a great effort, Gloria shook her head. Her thoughts flew to May. What terrible trouble was she in? What had happened to Dr. John?

"He shot himself," Mother Gregory said. There was a long silence. Then Mrs. Gregory arose and called down the stairs to Maggie.

"Maggie, bring up the paper, please," she asked. In a minute she came back into the room, shaking out the rustling sheet.

"Dr. John Seymour . . ." she began to read. But Gloria stopped her.

"No, no," she said. "Don't read it! I must go to May! She hasn't anybody but me. . . ."

She ran down the stairs, and out into the street. A trolley car was coming. She ran to catch it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Oh, it couldn't be true! There must be some mistake! Things like that didn't happen in this warm, sunny world with its blue sky and its June roses everywhere!

And that it should happen to May of all people! Careless, carefree May, who was like a yellow butterfly that did nothing but dance in the sun. . . .

But May was a butterfly crushed on the wheel when Gloria saw her that June morning.

She lay with her face turned to the wall in her darkened bedroom. She made no sound at all when Sarah, the old laundress, opened the door to let Gloria in.

"My dear," the girl said, leaning over her, "I'm so sorry. . . ."

May didn't answer. She lay motionless in her frivolous pink silk nightgown. Gloria sat down beside the bed and began to stroke her arm.

"Don't cry, dear," she murmured. There were tears in her own eyes.

But May was not crying. The face that she turned to Gloria at last, was hard and white as flint.

"I killed him," she said dully. "You know that, don't you? Just as surely as if I'd held the gun!"

"Hush, dear," Gloria begged. "You don't know what you're saying."

May made a noise in her throat that was halfway between a sob and a laugh—a terrible sound.

"I killed him!" she said again, clearly. "Jim Carewe . . ."

Her voice broke on the name. She suddenly burst into a storm of frightful sobs, and threw herself back on the bed, waving her arms like a crazed woman. She tore at her hair.

Gloria rushed out into the hall for help. A nurse in uniform was running upstairs. It was Mrs. O'Hara—Dr. John's "boss" nurse.

"You'd better go," she said to Gloria over her shoulder, as she went into May's room.

Shaking all over, Gloria hurried downstairs.

Lola Hough came out of Dr. John's little office back of the dining-room. She had on a bungalow apron, and she looked as if she had been crying.

"Hello, Gloria," she said quietly. "What's happened up there?" She jerked her head toward the second floor.

"May's crying, that's all," Gloria answered. "Lola, how did this thing happen? Do you know?"

Lola looked at her steadily for a minute with her moist blue eyes.

"Yes, I do," she said. "I was here when it happened last night . . . alone with May."

Gloria sat down weakly on the hall seat. "How terrible for you!" she gasped.

But Lola shook her head. "No," she said. "I was glad May wasn't here alone with—him. And it was just by chance that I happened to be here. It was almost midnight, and the baby had the colic. I knew the drugstore would be closed at that hour, so I ran over here to get some peppermint from Dr. John."

Lola paused for a moment. She wet her dry lips with her tongue and went on. "As I came up the street, I saw Jim Carewe's car leaving the house. And May still had on her hat when she let me in. . . . Of course, she'd been out riding with Jim! But anyway, I'd hardly set foot inside the house when we heard a shot in Dr. John's office. I looked in. . . ."

"And was he dead when you looked?" asked Gloria, shocked to her finger ends.

"Stone dead," Lola answered. "I called the police, and then I thought we ought to have Dr. John's lawyer. So I phoned Dick."

"How did you know he was at his office?" Gloria asked sharply.

"I didn't, but your house didn't answer, Central said," Lola explained. "So I took a chance on the office, and got him. He came right over."

So this was where Dick had been! All of the time when Gloria had pictured him with Susan Briggs, either in his office or walking home with her under the stars!

"Our phone didn't ring last night at all," Gloria said, presently, "and it wasn't out of order, because I was talking to May at half past nine, or so . . . just before she went out

with Jim, I suppose. . . . Oh, I'll bet the burglar cut the wires!"

Lola's blue eyes showed their whites with surprise.

"Now, don't tell me you had burglars last night!" she cried.

"We certainly did!" Gloria replied. "They stole all our flat silver. . . . I heard 'em! I was waiting up for Dick to come home—worried to death, because I didn't know where he was!"

Lola smiled bitterly. "I guess you don't have to do much worrying about where Dick is at night!" she said. "He's a man in a million . . . I wish Bill behaved himself half as well as Dick Gregory does!"

She laughed with sudden nervousness. "Bill's having a terrible time to-day," she said. "He stayed home with toothache. So I left him in charge of the kids for a while. The baby's tummy ache is gone, and he was asleep when I left. But the twins'll keep Bill busy. . . . He'll get a taste of my job and its joys!"

But there was no laughter in Gloria that morning.

"Lola," she said, shuddering, "why do you suppose Dr. John did this terrible thing?"

Lola was not the kind of woman who balked at the truth. She said what other people only thought. She said it now.

"Why, because of Jim Carewe, of course!" she rapped out. "He knew May was crazy about Jim. He'd forbidden her to see Jim. But you know May. . . . She does as she pleases. And I suppose Dr. John sat here alone for hours last night, brooding, until he just didn't know what he was doing. That's the way I've figured it out, anyway!"

"Yes, but to kill himself! He must have been out of his mind!" Gloria shook her head. "Honestly, Lola, I never thought Dr. John cared if May ran around with Jim, I used to wonder why he didn't."

"Oh, he cared, all right enough," Lola answered, "but you never can tell what those quiet men are thinking about. They bottle everything up inside themselves . . . until they do something like this!"

Out in the cheerful, sunny street again, Gloria thought over what Lola had said about Dr. John.

. . . Dick was the quiet kind of man, too! The kind of man who bottled up everything within himself! . . . Gloria wondered if he had brooded about her, as Dr. John must have

brooded over May for long months. The thought almost took her breath away.

She would go to Dick now, and beg him to let bygones be bygones! She would make him love her again, as he had loved her in the early days of their life together . . . the days when he trembled if he touched her. He had been under her spell once. He would be under it again.

But the sight of Miss Briggs sitting at her desk in Dick's office shook Gloria's confidence in herself, a little. Miss Briggs was actually pretty to-day! . . . Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were filled with sparkle.

"Well," Gloria said, "you don't look as if you'd worked half the night!"

"I didn't," Miss Briggs answered demurely. "Mr. Gregory sent me home at ten in a cab. He's very considerate."

Hmm! Like ice he was considerate, thought Gloria. . . . He could send his secretary home in a cab, but his wife could walk, for all he cared! . . . But, perhaps he thought that she had driven downtown in her little car, last night. He probably did think that.

Gloria opened the door of Dick's private office and looked in. It was empty.

"Where is Mr. Gregory?" she asked, turning to Miss Briggs.

"Mr. Gregory's gone out to lunch," Miss Briggs told Gloria. "But he ought to be back soon. If you'd like to, you can sit down and wait for him. You won't disturb me at all."

She went on with her typewriting.

Gloria glared down at her smooth head, bent over the machine.

. . . She guessed she had a perfect right to sit in her own husband's office without waiting for Miss Briggs' permission! And if she wanted to disturb Miss Briggs, she could do that, too. Watch her!

She took off her hat and tossed it down carelessly on Miss Briggs' desk. It bounded off onto the floor.

Gloria picked it up and handed it to Miss Briggs.

"Just brush that thing off," she said impudently.

Miss Briggs looked up at her in surprise. Then she flushed deeply. But without a word she wiped the dust from Gloria's hat with a hand-towel that she took from a drawer of her desk.

Then she hung it on the rack behind her.

"Look up our burglary insurance, while you're on your feet, Miss Briggs!" Gloria snapped.

From under her thick lashes she watched Miss Briggs go to the files on the other side of the room, and look for the insurance papers.

"Here they are, Mrs. Gregory," she said quietly, as she handed them to Gloria.

"And now call up the police and tell them we had a robbery at our house last night," Gloria directed her. "Tell them all our table silver was stolen. It was worth about \$200 . . . in case they ask you."

Miss Briggs stood looking down at her for a moment.

"Wouldn't it be better if you talked to them yourself, Mrs. Gregory?" she asked in a low tone. "They're sure to ask a lot of questions that I won't know how to answer."

Gloria met her look, coldly. "Will you please do what I told you to?" she drawled.

Miss Briggs bit her lips. It was on the end of her tongue to tell Gloria that not she, but Dick, was her employer. But, because of Dick, she said nothing.

She picked up the phone and called the police. They asked a dozen questions, and at last Gloria took the instrument from her, and answered them.

"I'll send a man out right away to look things over," the deep, masculine voice at the other end of the wire told her. "There have been a lot of burglaries in that neighborhood lately."

As Gloria turned away from the telephone, it suddenly occurred to her that there was no one at the house to admit the man from police headquarters when he got there.

"Oh, well," she thought, carelessly, "what's the diff? He can come back later." She didn't want him going through her house, now, anyway. The beds were still unmade, although it was afternoon, and the dirty dishes from yesterday's lunch were still piled in the greasy sink.

For some reason or other, an old English poem that her mother used to tell her when she was lazy, flashed into Gloria's brain. It was told about a collier's sloppy wife, who loved to gossip and hated to work. One evening he was killed at the mine. And when they brought his body home "the slut ran up to make the bed," the poem said with brutal frankness. Oh, well, after she had seen Dick and fixed things up with

him, she'd go home and straighten the house, Gloria promised herself. She would honestly try to be a better housewife from now on. . . .

"Won't you have a lettuce sandwich?" Miss Briggs' low voice broke in upon her thoughts.

She had opened a package of sandwiches, and a thermos bottle stood on her desk. From it came a thin curl of steam and the fragrant smell of coffee.

"I always bring my lunch from home, Mrs. Gregory. I find I can't afford to eat around at restaurants. . . . Will you have some coffee with me?"

"No, thanks," Gloria answered coldly. She was very hungry but she couldn't very well eat salt with Miss Briggs when she hated her as she did.

And she did hate her! She hated Miss Briggs' lovely voice and the dainty way she ate . . . everything about her.

Gloria watched her slyly. There really was something attractive about the woman. But, of course, she wasn't pretty the way Gloria was!

She curled herself up like a kitten in a big chair in the sunny corner by the windows. She took out her vanity case and looked at herself in its little mirror. Then her eyes traveled to Miss Briggs' face.

No—Susan Briggs at her best couldn't hold a candle to her when it came to looks. Her eyes were lovely, but there were fine crow's-feet at the corners of them. And there were shadows at the corners of Miss Briggs' mouth that would be deep, carved wrinkles in a few years.

. . . Was it possible that Dick was in love with this plain little woman who was at least eight years older than his beautiful young wife?

But perhaps he had tired of her just because she was his wife, Gloria thought bitterly. She had heard May Seymour often say in her flip, bitter way that no man loved his wife after the first flush of married life was gone. . . .

May Seymour! She of all women, had least reason for saying a thing like that! She must have known all along how desperately Dr. John cared for her.

A folded newspaper lay on the sill beside Gloria. She picked it up. It was full of the ugly details of Dr. John's suicide. On the first page was a large photograph of May in a plumed picture hat.

Poor May! She was fair game for any gossip to-day! Everybody's tongue was wagging about her.

What a life she was facing! For years and years and years people would remember that her husband had killed himself because of her love affair with another man . . . the story would hound her to the very day she died.

No matter where she went, the tale would follow her. No matter in what remote corner of the world she tried to hide, there would always be some one who knew all about her. For there always was somebody. . . . People never let you forget your shame.

. . . Gloria wondered if Jim Carewe was worth the misery that was waiting for May. Was any man . . . any happiness . . . worth such misery?

And what would Jim do now? Would he marry May when the scandal had quieted down? . . . Gloria doubted it. Jim wasn't the "marrying kind."

And suppose he did marry May?

Wouldn't the memory of Dr. John always be between them, like a ghostly hand keeping them apart? Of course it would. . . .

He hadn't been able to keep his wife away from Jim Carewe while he lived. But now that he was dead, it would probably be easy enough.

"Ugh!" Gloria shivered at the thought of the power the dead can have over the living.

Miss Briggs looked up at her. She had cleared away her lunch, and was reading a thin little book.

"I suppose," she said to Gloria, "you've been reading that piece in the paper about Dr. Seymour's suicide. Terrible thing, wasn't it?"

"Horrible," Gloria agreed. It was a relief to talk about it to any one. "Why do you suppose he did such a thing . . . a successful doctor, still young, and with everything to live for?"

Miss Briggs let her hands fall idly on her desk. They were lovely, sensitive hands . . . her one vanity.

"Perhaps he didn't have everything," she said very quietly. "Nobody has everything he wants in this world, nobody! And besides, I've heard that Dr. Seymour and his wife didn't get along very well together."

Now who had told her that. . . . Dick? Oh, no, Mrs.

O'Hara, of course! She was Miss Briggs' sister as well as Dr. John's "boss" nurse. She had probably known all about his troubles, Gloria said to herself. These nurses, they found out everybody's business. . . .

"Miss Briggs," Gloria asked abruptly. "Did you ever know why Dr. Seymour and his wife didn't get along?"

Miss Briggs opened her candid eyes. "Why, yes," she answered. "There was some sort of love affair between Mrs. Seymour and a Mr. Carewe, wasn't there? I've heard there was."

Gloria shook her head.

"It wasn't a love affair," she said. "Not what I'd call a love affair, at least. May Seymour is my best friend, and I happen to know she wasn't in love with Jim Carewe. She used to tear around with him because she was lonely. Dr. John was never at home, and May didn't have many women friends. . . . She called Jim her 'little boy friend' and that's all he was to her. I know!"

Miss Briggs looked at her with indignant, angry eyes.

"Oh, that's beastly!" she cried.

"What's beastly?" asked Gloria, bewildered. She didn't know what Miss Briggs was talking about.

"Oh, I mean that you could almost forgive a woman for a great big love affair that had swept her off her feet!" Susan Briggs said. "But when you think of a fine man like Dr. John Seymour killing himself over a 'parlor sheik' who happened to amuse his wife. . . . Oh, it's sickening! And what a hideous waste! . . . For Dr. John was needed. He was of some use in the world. . . ."

"Oh, May's not so bad!" Gloria said. She wanted to defend May, but she didn't see just what defense of her there was.

"She's just made a botch of things . . ." she finished, weakly. "I guess I won't wait any longer for Dick. I ought to go home."

She put on her hat before the mirror, fluffed out the dark reddish gold curls around her ears.

As she passed Miss Briggs' desk her eye was caught by the bright cover of the book she was reading. It was Robert Louis Stevenson's "Vailima Letters."

"Did Dick lend you that?" Gloria asked sharply. She didn't much care for the idea that Dick let Sue Briggs take his precious books.

"No, I bought it," Miss Briggs answered, blushing furiously. "I was interested in it because . . ." She stopped.

"Because Dick likes Stevenson? Is that what you're trying to say?" Gloria asked, cruelly. She saw in a flash that she had hit upon the truth. For Miss Briggs broke down.

She put her handkerchief up to her face and sobbed, tearless.

Gloria just barely touched her hand with one of hers.

"There's nothing for you to cry about," she said. "I've known for a long time that you're in love with Dick."

Miss Briggs stood up then, and faced Gloria.

The flush in her cheeks had gone, and her eyes were the cold blue of a Polar lake.

"What right have you to say such a thing to me?" she asked.

Gloria's laugh was taunting. "Well, it's the truth, isn't it? You are in love with Dick, aren't you?" she asked.

She could see Miss Briggs' breast heave under her plain blue dress.

"What if I am?" she asked. "I'd never let him know it! It wouldn't hurt any one. . . ."

She seemed to be lost in thought for a moment. Then her eyes flashed with spirit.

"I am in love with him—you may as well know it!" she cried. "I do care about him!"

Gloria wouldn't have believed that such a tone could have been wrung from the sedate and proper Miss Briggs. It was vibrant with tenderness.

"I do love him!" she said, again, as if it gave her a certain fierce satisfaction to say the words she had been waiting to say for years.

Gloria blinked with surprise. She couldn't imagine Miss Briggs telling her secret to the wife of the very man she loved. There must be something back of it. . . . Perhaps Dick loved her. And she knew it, and didn't care who else knew it!

"And Dick?—Is he in love with you?" Gloria asked. "Does he make love to you down here in this office when you're alone with him all day?"

A queer expression of disgust went over Miss Briggs' white face.

"Oh, no!" she said. "I wouldn't care for him if he were that kind of a man! . . . I'm just the woman who works for him. And I'm contented to be just that—for him."

The whole spirit of her love for him was in the words. They filled Gloria with pity for her.

"Miss Briggs," she said. "I'm truly sorry for you. . . . You'd rather hoped to marry Dick all those years when he was a bachelor, hadn't you?"

Miss Briggs smiled a wry little smile that twisted her mouth up at one corner.

"I suppose I had, without quite knowing it," she said. "Oh, let's stop talking about it . . . you'll never speak of it to Mr. Gregory, will you? Please, I'd die of shame!"

"We-ll, I'm not so sure you ought to go on working for him, feeling about him as you do," Gloria answered. "Do you think you should, yourself?"

Miss Briggs looked at her long and gravely. She could scarcely believe that, in her moment of weakness, she had told Dick's wife that she loved him.

"I've felt that way for a good many years . . . and it hasn't done any one any harm," she said, miserably.

"It has done you harm!" Gloria told her. "If it hadn't been for Dick, you'd probably have married long ago."

"Oh, no!" Miss Briggs cried. "You see, this was my first job. Mr. Gregory's been my whole life for years. I couldn't have thought of marrying. . . ."

"That's just it," said Gloria. "If a girl happens to work for a young, good-looking man, she's so likely to fall in love with him! She's a sort of a day-time wife to him, looking after his comfort, reminding him of his engagements, keeping his pencils sharpened. . . . Oh, I know! I used to be a stenographer, myself, you know."

"And were you in love with the man you worked for?"

"Heavens, no! You should have seen him! Old as Methuselah, and crosser than two sticks!" Gloria answered. "Well, I guess I'd better be going—tell Dick I stopped in to see him, will you?"

Miss Briggs nodded, dumbly. She looked as if she wanted to say something else. But before she could frame the words, Gloria was gone.

She sat quietly at her desk, when the sound of Gloria's high heels had died away down the corridor. All around her was a blankness that left her brain naked to outward impressions . . . the loud ticking of a clock in Dick's private office, the clanging sound of the elevator outside the door.

"I shouldn't have told her," she thought at last. "How did I happen to tell her . . . of all people? I must be losing my mind."

She got up and walked, in her small dignity, to the clothes rack, and took down her hat.

She closed her desk, and went out of the office. She knew she couldn't face Dick that day.

But she faced the world with a high bravery. She smiled at the elevator boy, and told him it was a lovely day and she was going out to enjoy it—to play hookey for once. From sheer habit, she bought a paper.

. . . She wondered if she would ever enjoy anything again. Her heart was breaking. And her pride was broken, too.

"I suppose I'll lose my job," she thought dully. "She's sure to tell Mr. Gregory. She'll make him discharge me, sure as death."

It was characteristic of Susan Briggs that she never thought of the man she loved except as "Mr. Gregory." She never had.

CHAPTER XXXIX

As Gloria went up the front steps of her house, the mother of the Donberg twins came across her front lawn toward her.

"There was a policeman at your house a while ago," she said, pleasantly. "What crime have you been committing?"

She carried her mending basket in her hands. Gloria could see that she was primed for a neighborly chat. But she didn't want to be neighborly with Mrs. Donberg. She was the type of woman for whom Gloria had no use . . . the home body who talked of nothing but marmalade, marketing, and moth-marbles.

"We had burglars last night," Gloria said, without a smile, "and I've been so excited all day that I haven't done a bit of housework. I've got to get busy now and do it before my husband comes home."

She went into the house, and closed the door behind her.

There was a musty smell in the rooms. The house needed a thorough airing, as well as a good cleaning.

Gloria threw the windows wide open and went upstairs. She took off her hat and went to work.

All the soiled linen came off the beds. She made them up fresh and smooth. She hung a neat row of towels in the bathroom, and scoured the tub.

She began to enjoy her job. It was rather fun to dash around from room to room banging the ashes from the tray on Dick's bedside table, slapping up the pillows on the window seat in the room from which Dick had banished her.

Well, she wouldn't stay in banishment, much longer, Gloria made up her mind.

She would show Dick that she really did mean to be a good wife to him . . . and he would take her back into his heart, again.

It was perfectly silly for them to live apart this way, under the same roof. And unnatural, besides.

"And if Dick ever brings up Stan Wayburn again, I'll ac-

cuse him of being in love with Miss Briggs," Gloria said to herself. "I'll tell him she would never have fallen for him if he hadn't made love to her, first. That'll shut him up, quick enough!"

The more she thought about Miss Briggs the more firmly Gloria decided to tell Dick he'd have to send her packing. To have a secretary around who was in love with Dick was just throwing temptation in his way. . . . Few men could resist a woman who was crazy about them. She appealed to their love of flattery.

And no man was deaf and blind to flattery . . . not even the level-headed Dick. Yes, he'd have to get rid of Miss Briggs. That was all there was to it. . . .

Gloria ran downstairs. She heated the water in the kitchen tank and washed up the dishes in the sink. She scoured it out, and mopped the floor. It didn't look much better when she had finished than when she began . . . but it had the strong, pungent smell of a good cleaning, anyway. That was something. At least Dick could tell that she had been at work on it! He could see that she was trying her best to be a housekeeper.

That, if anything, ought to melt him!

At five o'clock Gloria ran upstairs and bathed.

At six she looked like anything but a woman who had spent the afternoon cleaning up a house.

She was herself, again . . . a creature of beauty charged with elegance. Her hair was like molten copper. Her skin was sweet in its sheer cleanness. And all around her hung the old fragrance of mimosa-flower that had always turned Dick's head.

She was Gloria at her loveliest . . . her most alluring.

When she heard Dick's key in the lock she ran downstairs to him, on winged feet.

"I was just going out to buy some things for our supper," she said to him with an adorable smile. "I've been so busy all day that I forgot to phone the grocer."

Her voice was as natural and sweet as if it had never uttered a cruel word. It implied that she and Dick were the best friends in the world.

"The stores are all closed at this time of night, and you know it," Dick said to her. "Don't stall. . . . What do you want to do? Go downtown and eat? Gosh, I'm getting tired

of eating in restaurants, though! Try to have something cooked to-morrow night when I get home, will you?"

"You know I will," Gloria answered. "I'll even get supper here to-night if you'll drive me over to the delicatessen. . . . Let's get some ham and eggs and you can show me how to fry them. That'll be fun!"

"No," Dick said wearily. "I'm too tired to fuss around. I didn't have a wink of sleep last night. . . . You heard about John Seymour, of course?"

Gloria nodded. The feeling of horror that she had every time she thought of Dr. John's suicide closed down over her like black wings.

"Oh, Dick," she breathed. "Wasn't it awful? . . . I've just been sick about it all day!"

She waited for him to put his arms around her, to comfort her—as he would have done a few weeks ago. But he made no move toward her.

"I tried to get you on the phone last night when Lola Hough phoned me to go to Seymours', but Central said you didn't answer. I guess you were asleep," Dick said. "Come on, let's go."

"I was not asleep!" Gloria answered. "The telephone wires were cut. There was a burglar in this house last night while you were out! He was near enough to me to touch me. . . . I even saw him in the dining-room!"

Dick stared at her, with his hand on the open door of the hall.

"What did he take?" he asked.

"All the forks and knives and spoons that your mother gave us for a wedding present," Gloria said. "But that's not the point. The terrible part of it was that I was frightened out of my wits, almost. . . . And I'll never stay in this house alone, again, so long as I live. See?"

Gloria followed Dick out to the garage.

She couldn't help noticing how his shoulders drooped and his step lagged when he walked.

"Rikky," she said, using the old nickname, "I'm sorry as the dickens that I didn't have dinner ready for you to-night. I can see that you're dead tired. How much sleep did you have last night?"

"Not a wink," Dick answered. "How could I sleep when my best friend had just killed himself because of his utterly worth-

less wife? I can't figure out why John cared so much for a good-for-nothing creature like May. . . . He should never have married her in the first place! That was his big mistake."

Gloria bit her lip. She wondered if Dick thought she was any better than May. Perhaps he was sorry that he had married her. . . .

Well, she wouldn't let him be sorry! She had turned over a new leaf.

"Where are we going?" she asked as the car turned the corner.

"We're going to invite ourselves to Mother's for a meal," Dick answered grimly. "I'm sick of restaurant food. I'm fed up on it."

Neither of them said another word until they swung into the broad driveway of the Gregory homestead.

It looked so peaceful and welcoming to-night, with its lights streaming out from the windows . . . its rose bushes blooming beyond the sweep of lawn.

Mother and Father Gregory were just sitting down to dinner, when Dick and Gloria walked in.

"Well, isn't this a fine surprise!" Mother Gregory cried. She got up and put her arms around Dick, while Father Gregory beamed at them over his horn-rimmed spectacles. Gloria felt left out in the cold.

"How did you know we were going to have strawberry shortcake for supper?" Mother Gregory asked. She turned to Gloria and gave her the briefest of kisses.

"I smelled it!" Dick answered, laughing. "Blocks and blocks away I smelled it . . . above the rich perfume of gasoline that scents our town! And it drew me, like a magnet!"

He looked like a boy as he sat down at the table . . . care-free and happy, in his old home. Gloria watched him with narrowed eyes. She hadn't seen him like this for weeks.

Mother Gregory bustled around the room, getting out plates from the china cabinet, and napkins from the sideboard.

"Leg of lamb, to-night—and fresh peas. I shelled them myself, and they were a job!" she said. But there was no complaint in her voice. She was a born housekeeper, and she loved hard work . . . really enjoyed it!

Gloria looked around the room. She couldn't help thinking how different it was from her own dining-room at home!

There the silver was tarnished, and the chairs were dusty.

Here there were fresh roses in the center of the snowy cloth. Everything . . . glasses, forks and furniture . . . that could be made to shine, was agleam. There wasn't a speck of dirt anywhere.

The salad was crisply cold, and the things that should be hot were hot. The meal was delicious.

"Mother Gregory," Gloria said, on a sudden impulse. "You're wonderful! If I could keep house just half as well as you I'd be satisfied! And, by jinks, I'm going to learn how to do it!"

Mother Gregory laid down her fork. She gave Gloria a searching look.

"My dear child!" she said. "That's the most sensible thing I've ever heard you say! And if you need any help, come to me for it."

"Give her your recipe for strawberry short-cake," Dick suggested. "You said you were going to have short-cake, didn't you?"

Mother Gregory laughed.

"As Gloria would say, 'we are going to have nothing else but,'" she answered. "Gloria, you carry out the plates while I cut the short-cake. It's Maggie's night out."

Gloria picked up the platter and took it out into the big, clean kitchen.

"I've been thinking over what you told me this morning," Mother Gregory said to her, quietly. "About you and Dick living apart. . . . I wouldn't worry about that if I were you. It will turn out all right, after a while. Dick's pride's hurt . . . and I can't say I blame him."

Gloria shook her pretty head.

"No," she said. "It goes deeper than that. Dick doesn't care for me any more. . . . I saw it in his face to-night. And it isn't that he hates me. He's just indifferent to me. He's through with me!"

She went into the dining-room and came back with a pile of plates, and a vegetable dish.

"Then, whom is he in love with?" Mother Gregory asked. "If he's not in love with you . . . depend upon it, a man of Dick's age is always in love with somebody. That's Nature."

Gloria stood silent for a moment, watching Dick's mother pile whipped cream on the short-cake.

"Yum, yum! Doesn't that look deluscious!" she said child-

ishly. Then she sobered. "I told you this morning that I think he's fallen in love with Miss Briggs. And I do think so!"

"Nonsense!" Mother Gregory said sharply. "Dick likes you just as well as he ever did! You just settle down and be a good wife to him, and he'll be tickled to death with you."

She nodded vigorously, so that all the beads on her black dress sparkled.

"I really haven't been a good wife, have I?" Gloria asked humbly. Afterward she wished she hadn't said that.

Mother Gregory was the soul of frankness always. She opened her lips, now, and let Gloria have the truth about her wifehood . . . or at least what she considered the truth.

"You never were any kind of a wife at all to Dick!" she said. "You were a drag and a worry to him . . . a pretty toy. And any toy becomes tiresome, after a while."

She put her hands on the girl's slim shoulders, and looked at her gravely.

"Months ago I told you married life wasn't a game, but a business, didn't I?" she asked. Gloria nodded.

"You believe me now, don't you?" Mother Gregory went on. "And I'm going to tell you something else. Nothing ties a man to a woman like a child. You take my advice, and give Dick a son or two . . . and a couple of daughters. . . ."

Tears smarted in Gloria's eyes. It was too late now, for that wise advice. Dick no longer loved her. . . . He didn't want her to be the mother of his children. She was sure of that.

She winked away her tears, and helped Mother Gregory serve the short-cake.

There was a chill in the air when Dick and Gloria left the Gregory homestead at ten that night.

Gloria shivered in her thin silk frock. She cuddled up against Dick in the machine, and laid her head down on his shoulder.

But he paid no attention to her. He might have been a man of iron as he sat at the wheel.

"Move over, Gloria," he said finally. "You're in my way. I can't reach the brake."

"You don't need the brake. There's no traffic," Gloria said crossly. But she moved away from him. She had a wild desire to cry.

"You just don't want me near you!" she said, her voice trembling. "I know—I know."

Dick said nothing.

In silence that seemed to crackle all around them . . . so electric it was . . . they drove into the garage, and walked around to the front of the house.

"Well, I wonder how many burglars will visit us to-night!" Dick said as he turned the key in the lock. They went in.

"It's a shame about that silver . . . although we were insured," Gloria answered. "I went down to the office to-day, and had Miss Briggs look it up."

Dick frowned. "I wish you wouldn't come down there and give her orders," he said. "When I got back from lunch to-day, she was gone. Her mother called up to say she'd been taken sick. I suppose her feelings were hurt because of something you said to her. . . . You were rude enough to her last night! . . . Now you promise you'll stay away from my office!"

Gloria tossed her head willfully.

"She wasn't sick because of anything I said to her!" she exclaimed. "It was something she said to me that made her sick, I'll bet you!"

Dick sat down in his armchair and filled his pipe.

"Well, what did she say?"

"Told me what a crush she has on you," Gloria answered calmly.

Dick leaped to his feet. "What!" he almost shouted.

"Sure she did," Gloria said. "She told me she's been in love with you for years and years. She said that right up to the time you married me she hoped you'd fall in love with her. . . . That's why she hates me so! She thinks I came between you."

Gloria stood in front of him, watching to see how he took it.

He took it, unwillingly. He didn't want to believe this thing that Gloria had just told him, although he must have guessed it.

"Are you telling me the truth, Gloria?" he asked at last.

Gloria threw out both her little hands and grabbed the lapels of his coat. "Why should I tell you a lie?" she asked.

"I don't know," Dick answered. "But you've told me a good many of them, you know, in the last few months."

Gloria winced under the sting in his quiet voice.

"Well, whether you believe it or not, it's the truth," she said. "She's in love with you . . . and you've got to get rid of her. You'd better hire a man for your secretary next time. He won't fall for your fatal beauty!"

She sat down on the davenport, and picked up a magazine. She turned its pages idly. Every nerve was waiting for Dick's answer.

He took his pipe from his mouth, emptied the ashes from it, and began to scrape its bowl with his penknife. Gloria could see that he was thinking hard. His eyebrows were pinched into a frown.

"No," he said presently. "I'm not going to discharge Susan Briggs. She's a good worker . . . and she never upsets me. No matter how nervous I am, she soothes me, somehow . . . just the sound of her voice, the way she looks."

He was trying, in his awkward man's way to tell Gloria that the very sight of Susan Briggs' quiet eyes gave him a sense of profound placidity and strength . . . the thing he needed.

"Why!" Gloria cried out. "You're talking about her as if you're crazy about her. You are in love with her! . . . I've told you so, before. And I was right!"

Dick frowned. His eyes looked straight ahead of him under their bent brows.

"No, I'm not 'crazy'—as you call it—about any woman," he said deliberately. He walked to the open window and stood, with folded arms, looking into the fragrant darkness beyond.

"When you say that do you mean me, too?" Gloria asked. There was an agony of entreaty in her voice. "Do you mean that you don't care about me, any more?"

Dick turned slowly toward her, without answering. The movement brought him face to face with her.

She looked at him narrowly, at first only with curiosity; then with a kind of terror. . . . His eyes were cold and without light.

Gloria felt as if some curtain had dropped between them . . . a curtain that she could not pierce.

She stepped back and put up her hand in a little defensive movement. "You don't love me any more!" . . . She answered her own question.

And then she burst into hysterical tears. Through her eyelashes, gathered into little wet points, she could see Dick looking at her curiously, as if he had never seen her before.

She watched him drop into his chair and pick up a book. He set it up between them, like a barrier, and began to read.

. . . The clock in the hall struck eleven . . . and, as if the sound of it freed some blocked movement in Gloria's brain, she pulled herself together and went upstairs.

As she went she heard Dick strike a match, for his cold pipe. He was calmly settling down to a quiet evening. . . . No doubt he was glad she was gone!

CHAPTER XL

"I WILL get back!" Gloria said fiercely to herself the next morning when she awoke. She had set her alarm clock for seven!

"I will get back into Dick's life! I belong there. He can't put me out of it!"

She bathed, and dressed herself in one of the bungalow aprons that Ranghild had worn for her morning work. Then she tiptoed downstairs and brought in the milk and the paper from the back porch.

She lighted the gas stove and took the coffee tin from the kitchen cupboard. She stood looking at it helplessly. How did you make coffee?

There were no directions on the gay wrapper around the tin, and Gloria didn't own a cook book.

Then suddenly she remembered that Dick knew how to make coffee. She would run upstairs and ask him how it was done.

She knocked on his door. "Dick . . . I've brought you the morning paper," she called, brightly.

In a moment Dick opened the door.

"Thanks." His eyes took her in—the bungalow apron, the rolled-up sleeves, and the coffee tin in her hand.

"What do you think you're doing?" he asked. An amused smile flickered over his face.

"Making coffee for my husband!" Gloria answered pertly. "Only I don't know how to make it. Aside from that I'm getting along fine!"

Dick's smile broadened into a grin. "I suppose you're after my recipe," he said. "I use a tablespoon of coffee for each cup, and an extra one for the pot."

Gloria's spirits lifted at his good humor. And something in her breast that he had been like a lump of ice, seemed to melt. . . . She was sure that he hadn't meant his harshness to her last night. He hadn't meant what he had said. . . .

She put up her lips for him to kiss. "You aren't peeved at

your Gloria, are you?" she asked. She laid her hand on his cheek, and came a step nearer.

Then, with a little sigh, she put her head down on his shoulder. It was good to be there with Dick, friends once more. Like the solution of a problem.

"We've quarreled long enough . . . you and I. Kiss me!" she said.

But as she spoke, she knew she was making a mistake. She could feel Dick draw away from her.

Her hands dropped at her sides, and she went downstairs without another word.

She made the coffee, according to Dick's campfire recipe, and put it on the stove to boil.

When he came downstairs to breakfast, it was more than ready.

"I'm sorry there isn't toast," Gloria said as she poured it for him, "but there wasn't so much as a crumb of bread in the house. I'll stock up to-day."

She tried to drink a cup of her coffee. But she had to admit to herself that it was too bitter to drink. She didn't dare to offer Dick a second cup of it.

"Will you be home to-night for dinner?" she asked as he got up from the table.

She hoped that he would at least offer to kiss her good-by. But he didn't.

"Yes, I'll be home," he said colorlessly. "I think I'll take your car to-day. You don't seem to drive it any more . . . do you mind if I do?"

Gloria shook her head. There was a lump in her throat. She watched Dick drive down the street, her vision blurred with tears. She wiped them away, angrily.

"What's the matter with me?" she asked herself. "Am I falling in love with the poor simp?"

Was she? . . . Or had she always been in love with him? And had it taken her jealousy of Miss Briggs to unveil the fact to her? . . .

The thought of Miss Briggs down in Dick's office with him all day was a torment to her. She stopped in the middle of her work a dozen times that morning to wish that Dick had a man secretary instead of Susan Briggs.

"He's just got to fire her!" she kept telling herself. "I just

won't have her down in that office with him. That's all there is to it!"

Soothing and sympathetic, was she? Well, Gloria would show Dick that she, herself, could be soothing and sympathetic. If that was Miss Briggs' method of "vamping" Dick, that would be Gloria's game. Two could play at any old game.

The sight of Dick's shabby old house-coat hanging in his closet was an inspiration to Gloria. She would buy him a new one. Goodness knew he needed it!

And it wouldn't be a dull gray one like this. . . . It would have some pep and dash about it. . . .

When Dick came home that night, the table was neatly set. There was an appetizing odor of frying steak in the house. And Gloria, in a clean white dress, came out of the kitchen to meet him.

"Dinner will be ready in two minutes," she greeted him cheerfully. "And when you go upstairs to wash your hands, take a peek at the surprise I have for you up there."

On the bed in Dick's room was spread Gloria's "surprise" . . . a purple silk house-coat lined with scarlet.

"Holy suffering cats!" Dick said to himself. "Does she think I'd wear a thing like that!"

He went down to dinner in his suit. Gloria's face fell when she saw him.

"Aren't you going to put on your new house-coat?" she asked.

Dick shook his head. "You know I never wear bright colors like that, Gloria," he said, "though it is a doggoned nice coat. Thanks."

"What'll I do with it?" Gloria asked pathetically. She looked as if she were going to cry. "Take it back?"

"You didn't pay cash for it, did you?" Dick asked.

"N-no," Gloria faltered. "I charged it to you."

"And how much was it?" Dick's voice had grown stern.

"Not very much . . . only \$50," Gloria replied. "It really was a bargain. It had been \$75 . . . awfully good silk in it."

Dick sat down at the dining-room table.

"Now look here, Gloria," he said. "I've told you a dozen times that you're not to go downtown and run up bills without asking me about it, first. . . . And in spite of it, you

charge a \$50 house-coat to me in a store where I owe money as it is!"

Gloria felt a frown growing between her eyebrows.

"Well, what do you want me to do . . . take the thing back?" she asked. "I'm going to be terribly ashamed if I have to, let me tell you!"

"I'll take it back," Dick answered. "Just do it up in a bundle, and I'll take it with me in the car to-morrow morning. . . . I hate to seem ungrateful, Gloria, but a \$50 present that isn't paid for wouldn't give me any satisfaction at all. I'd have the blues every time I put it on."

Gloria shook her head. "I can't understand you at all, Dick," she said. "Suppose you do owe a few bills? Everybody does. Nobody ever has every dollar paid right up on the first of the month."

Dick was silent. He made little dots on the tablecloth with the tines of his fork.

"I . . . I suppose you'll have a fit if I mention the word 'clothes' to you," Gloria went on, after a minute, "but I haven't a single summer dress. You know you promised me I could have some before you went away on your trip. Remember?"

"Yes," Dick answered quietly. "But don't you think it's more important for us to get some of our old bills paid off, first?"

"No!" Gloria cried, angrily. "I'm just about at the point where I could go to jail for debt, cheerfully, like Mr. Micawber. That is, if I could have a few clothes. . . . I'm in rags!"

Dick's lip curled. "Pretty costly rags, I'll say," he remarked. "You bought three \$100 dresses just a few weeks ago. I'll bet my mother never had one dress in all her life that cost that much. And Dad could buy and sell me a dozen times over . . ."

"It's just terrible that you have to support a wife, isn't it?" Gloria asked with fine sarcasm. "I feel sorry for you!"

"You should!" Dick answered. "All I hope is that you'll feel so sorry for me that you won't buy any more \$50 hats for a while!"

Gloria moved irritably under his angry gaze. "You think of every penny . . ." she said.

"I've got to think of every penny!" Dick answered. "And you must, too, for a while, until I get on my feet again. That sickness of mine knocked everything in the head . . . There's just one way of looking at this thing. Our marriage has become

nothing but a business partnership—and a one-sided one, at that.”

“Oh, is that so!” Gloria cried. “So that’s the way you’ve come to feel about it. . . . Well, thanks, I don’t care for any! If that’s all I mean to you, I’m through! See? All through!”

The minute Gloria told Dick she was through with him she was sorry.

She was not through with him! She was just beginning to be interested in him as she had never been before in all her life.

Hoping that he wouldn’t take her at her word, she found herself breathlessly waiting for his answer. It came.

“All right, Gloria,” he said. “And this time, it’s for good. Remember! No coming back!”

Gloria couldn’t speak. With her little head held high, she marched past him into the kitchen.

The steak was burning in the frying pan. Gloria took it from the stove, and put it away in the ice-box, steaming hot as it was. She tossed the bread-tray with the bread on it back into its box. The asparagus and salad went into the garbage can.

“If I can’t be his wife, I won’t be his cook . . . that’s a cinch!” she thought to herself.

She stood at the screen door looking out into the yard. There was a strong smell of boiling fruit in the air. Mrs. Donberg, next door, must be responsible. . . . It was the season for preserving.

Suddenly Gloria saw the beauty of the common lot . . . of a woman working for a man, and him for her. Of their children. And their little homes and backyard gardens. . . . It was a precious thing, the everyday kind of love that Dick had once offered her. And that she hadn’t had the wit to accept!

Tears scalded her eyes, and ran down her cheeks.

Blinded by them, she felt her way upstairs and into her own room. She packed her overnight bag.

Dick was waiting for her in the hall when she came downstairs. She looked up at him with red-rimmed, swollen eyes.

“I’ll come back to-morrow to pack my trunks,” she said. “I’m going home to Mother’s, now.”

“No,” he objected. “We’ll do this thing decently. I’m not going to let you run crying down the street to-night. . . . We won’t give the neighbors any more to gossip about than we

have to! You go upstairs to bed, now. And we'll talk things over to-morrow morning."

"Talk what over?" Gloria asked. "You want me to go . . . and I'm going. What is there to jabber about? I'm sick of all this talk, talk, talk!"

She drew a long sobbing breath.

"There are a good many things we've got to discuss," Dick said. "Selling the house, and the furniture . . . things of that kind."

Selling the house! And the furniture, too! . . . Ah, Dick must mean business then! He really must be through with her . . . eager to rid himself of her!

She looked around her at the bright, cheerful house with its cream-colored walls, its blue rugs, and the yellow curtains that looked as if sunshine were always pouring through them.

"I—I don't want to go away from my house!" she said in a whisper. She couldn't trust her treacherous voice.

"Oh, rats!" Dick exclaimed. "You've never stayed in this house long enough to care for it. Six months from now you'll have forgotten you ever lived in it . . . with me!"

Gloria had no answer to that. She went back up the stairs with lagging steps.

She locked herself in her room and went to sleep. When Dick knocked on her door in the morning, she did not get up.

"There's no use in our talking to each other," she called wearily. "We'll only have another row. . . . Good-by."

To Gloria's disappointment, Dick went without saying another word. She lay, listening tensely to his retreating foot-falls.

Her nerves shook to the sound of the front door closing behind him . . . to the purr of the little car rolling out of the yard.

And when it had died away in the distance, she got up and dressed, slowly and uncertainly.

CHAPTER XLI

MRS. GORDON was washing the breakfast dishes when Gloria opened the screen door that led into the clean, sunlit kitchen from the back porch.

"Well, forevermore! Where are you going, bag and baggage?" She looked down dubiously at the overnight bag Gloria carried.

"I'm not going anywhere. I've arrived," Gloria answered, "I've come home."

Her mother scalded the silverware. "Speaking of arrivals," she said, "your cousin Lulu's baby is here at last! It was born last night at the hospital. . . . My goodness! After a while all the 'famous birthplaces' of presidents and authors will be hospitals, I suppose! . . . I've always said I'd love to see the place where George Washington was born. Or did he just live at Mount Vernon? . . . No, I guess he was born there, wasn't he?"

Gloria set her bag down on the well-scrubbed floor.

"Mother!" she cried. "I've come home! I've left Dick!"

Her mother laid her dish towel down on the drain board.

"Tell me," she said, "did you leave Dick when you went to New York a few weeks ago? Everybody said you did. . . . I couldn't believe it. I was sure you'd have told me if you were separating. . . . But then, girls don't tell their mothers things the way they used to when I was young. I suppose I'd be the last one to hear it if you ever did leave him."

Gloria shook her head with exasperation.

"I'm telling you right now that I have left him!" she said. "I'm never going back to him! I've come home to stay here with you and Dad, if you'll let me."

Mrs. Gordon took off her glasses. "I can't see a thing with those things on," she said. "You go into the living-room and lie down. I'm going to make you some tea. You look peaked. . . ."

Gloria took her bag upstairs to the little room that had been hers for so many years of her life. It was beautifully clean, but depressing in its shabbiness.

She thought of her room at home with its soft, brilliant cushions, its chaise longue and the taffeta that draped the bed and windows.

With a heart like lead, she went downstairs. On the living-room table stood a tea tray.

Mrs. Gordon came in from the kitchen with a plate of hot toast in her hands.

"You eat some of this toast that I've made for you, too," she said. "And then tell me how you happened to leave Dick."

"There isn't much to tell. He said he was through with me. . . . So what could I do but pack my bag and get out?" Gloria asked.

Mrs. Gordon sat down in her old armchair. "Now, Gloria, that's not the truth," she said bluntly. "I know Dick too well to believe that tale . . . You probably told him you were through with him. Didn't you?"

Gloria thought for a moment. "Yes, I believe I did," she said. The whole affair was blurred in her mind by her own unhappiness.

"Well, then," her mother went on, "you've got to go back to Dick. Marriage isn't like a hat that you can wear for a while, and then throw away for a new one. . . ."

"I don't want a new one," Gloria answered miserably. "I don't ever want to see a man again!" She slipped to the floor and laid her head on her mother's knees.

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Gordon said. "You and Dick have just had some sort of a little spat or other. . . . You know, you're not an easy person to live with, Gloria! You fly up at nothing. . . . I often say to your Dad, 'Gloria isn't like either of us. She must take after old Aunt Fanny!' She had a tongue if ever a woman did!"

"I knew you'd say it was my fault if Dick and I ever had a bust-up," Gloria answered resentfully. "Everybody thinks Dick's perfect. . . ."

"No, he's not perfect. But he's the sort of man I should have liked to have had for a son. . . . If the good Lord had seen fit to send me one," her mother went on. "Dick's a pretty fine young fellow, Gloria. And you're going to regret it if you leave him!"

Gloria shook her head. But she knew that her mother was right. She was regretting it, already.

"What you ought to do is to go straight back home, and settle down to make Dick some sort of a wife!" Mrs. Gordon said suddenly. "I suppose it's partly my fault that you don't know how to cook or take care of a house . . . that you have to have a maid. I should have made you go into the kitchen and work right along with me, when you were engaged to Dick."

"I haven't any maid. Dick let Ranghild go," Gloria answered. "I've been doing my own housework since I came back from New York. . . ."

"Ah, hah! So that's it! I knew there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere!" her mother exclaimed. "You don't like to do housework, and you've been quarreling with Dick about it!"

"I have not!" Gloria jumped up from the floor. "He's in love with his stenographer, if you want to know! And he treats me as if I were his old maid aunt!"

Placidly Mrs. Gordon picked up the tray of dishes and went out into the kitchen with it.

"Oh, I guess it's not as bad as all that," she said comfortably. "A man doesn't wait till he's thirty to marry the wrong woman."

She laid her hands on Gloria's graceful shoulders.

"And even if he were in love with his stenographer," she said solemnly, "your job would be to win him back. . . . 'For better, for worse,' Gloria. That's marriage. It's no bed of roses."

Gloria stood as silent as a statue. In her ears she could hear her own voice repeating the words after the minister, as she had stood in that very room on her wedding day. . . . "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer . . . till death do us part."

Ah, there were other things that parted two people who had once loved each other . . . misunderstandings, pettiness. . . .

"All right, I'll go home!" Gloria said suddenly. "By jinks, I'll make things turn out the way I want them to! If it kills me!"

Her mother laughed at her fierceness. "It won't kill you," she said. "It'll be the saving of you, Baby. You haven't been a real wife yet, to Dick. You've just been playing at it."

The doorbell rang loudly through the little house.

"That must be your Aunt Dorcas," said Mrs. Gordon. "She said she'd stop in for me on her way to the hospital to see Lulu's baby . . ."

Gloria groaned.

Aunt Dorcas was a born gossip. She told everything she knew for the pure joy of seeing the look of surprise and interest dawn in her listeners' eyes.

"Now, Mother, please don't tell her anything about this trouble between Dick and me," Gloria begged. "If you do, it'll be all over town by dark!"

But she knew it was useless to ask her mother not to tell Aunt Dorcas anything. She was wax in the hands of Lulu's mother.

Aunt Dorcas was large and blond. She had the nose of a Roman senator, and the blue, inquiring eyes of a child. She turned one of her cheeks to Gloria to be kissed.

"Well, my dear!" she said briskly. "Lulu beat you to it, having a baby! And she's a year younger than you are, at that!"

Gloria laughed. "She's been married for two years, though," she said, "and I haven't been. . . . And anyway I should think you'd be furious with her for making you a grandmother at your age . . . only forty-four! And you don't look a minute over thirty-five, does she, Mother?"

Aunt Dorcas beamed.

"Wouldn't you like to come along with us to see the new baby, my dear?" she asked, flattered.

"I would. . . . I'd love to," fibbed Gloria, "but I've got to go home."

She ran upstairs to get her hat and over-night bag.

"Been here all night?" Aunt Dorcas asked sharply. Her eyes were fixed on the little bag.

"No," Gloria answered reluctantly. She shot a warning look at her mother.

"Gloria and Dick had a little quarrel," Mrs. Gordon said blandly, "and I've been talking her into going home. 'Bear and forbear' I say. That's the only way to get along with a man, isn't it?"

Aunt Dorcas shook her head. "Well, I don't know whether it is or not," she replied. "I never did think much of this young Gregory. I may as well tell you I always thought he was something of a snob . . . and if I were Gloria I wouldn't

take any back-chat from him! She's just as good as he is any day in the week!"

"I haven't taken any back-chat from him," said Gloria. "The whole thing's been my own fault. . . . And it isn't anything that matters, anyhow. A tempest in a teapot!"

Her aunt snorted. "No, I guess nothing's the matter when you pack up and come home!" she exclaimed. "I should say that something was very much the matter! . . . Well, are we ever going to start for the hospital, Libby?"

Mrs. Gordon hurried upstairs. "There's a pie I baked, all wrapped up for you on the pantry shelf, Gloria," she called downstairs. "Tell Dick I sent it to him."

Gloria tucked the pie carefully into one side of her bag. "I'd love to stay here and visit with you, Aunt," she said, "but I've just got to go home. . . ."

"I think you're very foolish to go home. If you've quarreled with your husband make him come here after you!" Aunt Dorcas spoke her mind. "You take my advice. . . . I'll bet your mother's been telling you to knuckle down and go home. That's the way she's been all her life . . . afraid to say 'Boo' to a goose! But what's it ever got her, eh? Nothing, so far as I can see!"

She tapped her foot angrily on the floor.

"She thinks she has a great deal," Gloria said softly. "And she and Dad really are happy in their way. . . ."

She kissed her aunt on her florid cheek where a tiny network of veins was beginning to show. She drew a sigh of relief when she escaped, at last, from the house and from Aunt Dorcas.

On her way home Gloria stopped in at a store and bought herself a housedress. It was a soft, pretty thing with frills around the neck and sleeves.

She had a sudden vision of herself in it when Dick should come home that night. He would think that she had gone . . . and there she would be, with dinner ready, the table set, the house clean! Wouldn't he get the surprise of his life!

Unless he had a heart of granite, that certainly ought to melt him . . .

And let's see, what would she have for dinner? Dick liked lamb chops and fresh peas. She'd have them, she guessed. . . . No, even Mother Gregory had said that it was quite a job to shell peas.

Gloria bought canned ones and a can of beets. And she saw some potato salad in a delicatessen she passed. So she bought that, too. It would save her going to the bother of cooking potatoes. . . .

Then there was the pie her mother had given her. Why, she wouldn't have anything to cook but the meat! Anybody could warm up canned vegetables.

"How long do you fry lamb chops?" Gloria asked the butcher as he wrapped them up for her.

"'Bout fifteen minutes, lady," he said. "Depends on how you like 'em, rare or well done."

How did Dick like his meat cooked? . . . Gloria didn't know. Well, she guessed she'd take a chance and fry them slowly for twenty minutes.

At six o'clock that night she put them on the stove. The peas and beets were in their kettles. The potato salad was heaped high in a bowl on the dining-room table.

Gloria's heart swelled with honest pride as she looked around the house. It was in what she called perfect order. There was a roll of dust, like a gray mouse, here and there in a shadowy corner . . . but no one would notice that she was sure.

She went upstairs to her room to put a little powder on her nose. She decided that she needed some more rouge on her cheeks . . . and more gloss on her fingernails.

Suddenly Gloria sniffed the air. . . . What was that queer smell? . . . The meat! The chops were burning!

She flew down to the kitchen. It was filled with smoke. The sputtering fat in the pan had caught on fire. It was blazing.

"Here's where the house goes up in smoke!" Gloria thought with terror. She lifted the red-hot pan from the stove in her bare hands.

Then she ran out doors with it, and threw it down on the grass. It hissed fiercely as she turned a spray of water from the garden hose on it.

Gloria was so excited that she did not hear Dick drive into the yard. It was only when she turned to go back to the house that she saw him watching her from the driveway.

"What have you been doing . . . having a bonfire?" he asked.

Gloria burst into tears. She ran over to the car to show Dick how she had burned her hands.

"No," she sobbed. "I just burned up all the chops . . . and I'm all blistered, too! . . . Oh—ooh, I meant to have such a good dinner, too. . . ."

"I didn't expect to find you here at all," Dick said calmly. "You said you were going to leave me, last night, you know."

Gloria hung her head. "I know I did," she said in a tone so low that Dick divined rather than heard her words, "but I changed my mind."

Dick studied her for a moment with half-lowered lids. Gloria thought she even detected a gleam of amusement in his eyes.

"Well, never mind about that," he said. "Run upstairs and get your hat, and I'll take you downtown for dinner. I'll wait here for you. Hurry."

Gloria put the fire out under the vegetables on the stove, and took the potato salad away.

She made a paste of baking soda and water to smear on her burns.

In the old days Dick would have done it for her, without doubt. He would have been filled with distress and pity . . . and he would probably have kissed the blistered hands.

Now he didn't seem to care. He was utterly indifferent to her. And the thought was all the harder to bear because Gloria knew that she had brought all this on herself . . . Dick's indifference and aloofness.

She had helped to build the wall that rose between them, mountain high. . . .

She put on a sage-green sports hat and went out to the automobile.

"Darn shame about your hands," Dick muttered as she got in beside him. Gloria said nothing.

"Where do you want to go to eat?" he asked.

Some demon in Gloria's brain prompted her answer. "Let's go to the restaurant where you and Miss Briggs eat," she said wickedly. "By the way, how is Miss Briggs behaving herself these days?"

"As usual . . . perfectly," Dick said.

"Hasn't she told you she loves you yet?" Gloria raised her

eyebrows in feigned surprise. "I thought that would be the first thing she'd do!"

It was a silent meal that they ate at the little corner table where the two of them and Susan Briggs had dined only a few days before.

The waiter had set their coffee down before them before either spoke.

"What's become of your rings?" Dick broke the silence that had hung like a smoke-screen between them. "Your wedding ring and your diamond?"

Gloria felt herself redden. "I—sold them when I was in New York," she faltered. "I had to have the money."

Dick looked down at her hands, curiously, but said nothing.

"I hated to do it," Gloria went on, feeling that she ought to say something. "But I didn't have a dollar to pay my hotel bill. I don't suppose I'll ever have another diamond like the one in my engagement ring, will I?"

"Not from me," Dick answered shortly.

Gloria leaned across the table toward him. Her eyes were soft and bright with unshed tears. And her voice trembled when she spoke.

"What difference does it make that the rings are gone . . . when the marriage they stood for is gone?" she asked. "You don't love me any more."

Dick looked at the date line of the paper he was reading.

"This is the tenth of June," he said. "Seven months ago to-day you and I were married. We were pretty good friends, then, weren't we?"

Gloria nodded. What was Dick driving at?

"And to-night we haven't a word to say to each other," he went on. "We're miles apart . . . We're strangers."

In her mind Gloria furiously debated that. She denied it . . . ridiculed it. She had plenty to say to Dick. . . . But she didn't know how to say it.

"No," she began. "We know each other too well . . . that's what's the matter with us. You know about me and Stan Wayburn. And I know you're in love with Miss Briggs. . . ."

She waited for him to say that he was not in love with Susan Briggs. But he buried himself again in his newspaper.

In silence they drank their coffee.

In silence they drove home.

And in silence that shrieked almost they settled down in the living-room to wait for bedtime to come. . . .

. . . Somewhere in the neighborhood a radio set sent forth a silver soprano through the still night air.

"Somebody loves me,
I wonder who . . ."

Unable to sit there facing Dick while the song went on, Gloria got up and went out doors. In the back yard the wind stirred the leaves of the poplar trees along the fence. Behind them was a theatrical white moon.

"Somebody loves me . . .
I wish I knew . . .
Maybe it's you."

The song died away wistfully in the air. But it had confused her . . . saddened her. Love! That was all there was that counted. When you had lost that, you might just as well be dead. . . .

The whole world was Love's footstool.

It was a background for love. Without it there need have been no heart-breaking music, no white moons, no beauty at all . . . anywhere.

. . . Gloria did not look at Dick as she went into the house and up the stairs where her room waited for her . . . her lonely room.

CHAPTER XLII

THE next morning Gloria went to see Mother Gregory.

Her mother-in-law was just leaving to go downtown on a shopping trip. In her black straw helmet topped with three plumes she looked like the pictures of the Black Prince. . . . And what a warrior she was, thought Gloria!

"I won't keep you a minute, Mother Gregory," Gloria said to her as they walked out toward the sidewalk. "I just want you to let me have Maggie for a week or so, to teach me to cook. Will you?"

Mother Gregory shrugged her shoulders. "If she'll go," she answered. "But I don't believe she will. Let's run in and ask her."

They turned back to the house. Maggie was on her knees scrubbing the kitchen floor. She sat back on her heels, as the two women entered.

"Maggie," Mother Gregory began timidly, for Maggie was the only human being in the world of whom she was afraid, "I wonder if you'll go over to Mr. Dick's house again for a few days. Mrs. Gregory wants you to teach her to cook . . ."

Maggie scowled. "Indeed I will not!" she announced flatly. "I went there once to teach her, and she wouldn't learn . . . wouldn't even try to learn. She's had her chance. And depend upon it, ma'am, she doesn't want to learn to cook now. All she wants is some one to do her dirty work for her. . . ."

Mother Gregory held up one of her large, gloved hands to stop the flow of Maggie's words as they came thick and fast.

"That will do," she said sternly. Then she turned to Gloria.

"I'll teach you to cook, my dear," she offered generously. "We'll start to-day if you like. Just wait until I run upstairs for a housedress . . ."

"But your shopping trip," Gloria reminded her.

"It can wait," Dick's mother answered easily, as she rustled upstairs.

Gloria wondered afterward why Mrs. Gregory had bothered to bring a housedress along with her. Certainly she didn't need it, for she didn't lift her hand to do a bit of work all day.

"We'll go to market first of all," she said to Gloria.

"But I always telephone the grocer," the girl objected.

Mother Gregory's lips tightened. "That's no reason why you should keep on doing it," she said firmly. "The only way to get fresh food is to go to the stores, yourself, and look around. To telephone is a lazy woman's way."

She showed Gloria how to pick out a young chicken, and how to test the tenderness of the asparagus, the freshness of the spinach.

She was kind and talkative, as they rolled homeward in her car. But when she stood in the hall of the house, and looked around her, all the kindness faded from her face.

"This place is a sight!" she exclaimed. "My stars! when was it cleaned last?"

"Yesterday," Gloria said in a low tone.

"You ought to be ashamed to admit it," Mother Gregory answered in her decided tones. "It doesn't look as if it's been touched for a month of Sundays. . . . Let's go upstairs and put on our working clothes and I'll show you a thing or two about cleaning!"

There began the first day of real work that Gloria had ever known.

Mother Gregory kept saying, "We'll dust this room now," or "Now, we'll scrub out the bath-tub." But what happened was that she did all of the directing, and Gloria did the actual work . . . the scrubbing, the sweeping, the polishing.

By noon her back ached, and her head throbbed with weariness.

"We'll have something to eat now," Mother Gregory said comfortably when the twelve o'clock whistles blew in the distance. "A little toast and tea will do for me. I never eat any lunch to speak of."

Gloria made the toast and the tea, while Mother Gregory cut a bouquet of roses from the bushes at the back of the house.

"You must have let the tea boil," she said as she tasted the cup Gloria set up before her. "It's bitter."

Gloria's face showed no more expression than that of the Sphinx. "I'll make some more," she said.

Not to save her life would she have admitted to Mother Gregory that she had thought that you boiled tea just as you boiled coffee . . . for seven minutes.

The afternoon was worse than the morning. Mother Gregory sat on the high kitchen stool and showed Gloria how to clean a chicken. She did not touch it herself.

"Most terrible job in the world," was the girl's comment when it was over. "Like a class in anatomy!"

But picking over the spinach was almost as bad. When it came to the asparagus, Gloria let the knife slip in her blistered hands, and cut her finger and her thumb.

"Thank goodness, it's done, anyway!" she said, when the last of the asparagus was in the colander.

"How about salad and dessert?" asked Mother Gregory.

"Do I have to have them?" Gloria asked pathetically. She was so tired and hot that it seemed to her she would have to lie down . . . or she'd drop.

Mother Gregory raised her eyebrows.

"If you're going to do this home-making job at all, Gloria, you'd better do it right," she said. "We can make a salad and some chocolate custard in ten minutes!"

"We?" thought Gloria. "What you mean by 'we' is that you'll sit there resting your face and hands while I do all the work!"

She was furious with Mother Gregory.

As soon as the custard was in the oven Mother Gregory suggested that "they" set the table.

"I couldn't have done a better job myself," said Mother Gregory as she took the custard from the oven.

"I'll go out in the yard and cut some more roses," she added, briskly, "while you're putting on the dishes."

"Her idea of a busy day seems to be cutting roses and ordering me around like a slave!" said Gloria to herself as Dick's mother disappeared through the back door.

"Now, let's get out the hose and wash off the front porch," was Mother Gregory's next suggestion when she came into the house with her armful of roses.

Gloria gritted her teeth together. But she lifted all the chairs down from the front porch and went to work with the hose and an old broom.

Presently Mother Gregory came around the corner of the house from the backyard. She had put on her hat and street dress.

"Good-by, my dear," she said. "I guess I'll have to be on my way. You've done just fine all day!"

She kissed Gloria and patted her weary shoulders.

"When you want any more help you know where to come, my dear, don't you?" She beamed at Gloria. "Straight to me!"

"Yeah, any old day I'll come to you for help, again!" Gloria thought resentfully. "I can work myself to death without your help, thanks!"

She went into the house, as soon as Mother Gregory's neat little car had disappeared around the corner. She threw herself down on the davenport in the living-room, and fell asleep at once.

Dick did not see her at once when he came home at half past six.

He stood in the hall, and looked around him, with a sense of foreboding. The house was filled with the pungent smell of a thorough cleaning, mingled with the odor of roast chicken.

Gloria must have hired a new maid! Not in a hundred years could she have cleaned the house as it had been cleaned. And that tantalizing smell of baked chicken! . . . Gloria couldn't actually have gone to the trouble of baking a chicken. . . .

Just then, she came out of the living-room. Her hair hung dankly about her pale face. Her lips drooped. And the bungalow apron she wore was dirty and covered with grease spots.

"Who did all the heavy housework? . . . Not you, I know," Dick said, unbelievably.

But his eyes swept Gloria from her untidy head to the hem of her bedraggled apron. He had never seen her like this before. . . .

She certainly looked as if she had been working!

"Who do you suppose did it?" she snapped at him. "The army of servants you've hired to help me? . . . Of course I did it, and I'm all in."

Every bone in her body ached. She dragged herself wearily past Dick into the kitchen. "Dinner's ready," she threw over her shoulder as she went.

The meal was done to a turn. The chicken was richly brown, the vegetables tender, and the salad chilled and crisp.

With the first thrill of housewifely pride that she had ever known, Gloria set the dishes down on the spotless tablecloth.

Marveling, Dick sat down to eat.

"I hope everything's as good as it looks," he said doubtfully. Gloria sent him a look of fury.

"It is!" she said.

And so it was. As he ate, Dick's sense of wonder grew. Had his wife become an expert cook overnight?

But when Gloria brought in the dessert, the mystery was solved for him. "It was Mother, bless her!" he said. "No one in the world makes chocolate custard like that but her!"

"It was not your mother," Gloria said with honest indignation. "I made that custard all by myself! All your mother did was to sit out in the kitchen and give me orders. . . ."

Dick nodded. "Sure, I knew she bossed the job," he said. "You couldn't cook a meal like that alone, on a bet! . . . What's she doing? Giving you cooking lessons?"

Gloria grunted.

"She's been giving me orders, mostly," she answered. "She said she'd come over and help me out. But all she did was to cut a lot of your best roses and strew them all over the house! . . . She's some kid. She ought to be a gang boss! She'd make a peach. . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't speak about my mother in that way, Gloria," Dick interrupted. He looked annoyed.

"Oh, blah, I'll do as I please," the girl answered, bitterly. "I'm getting tired of being slammed all the time. It's time I began to pan a few people myself. . . . You treat me like a doormat, and expect me to like it!"

"If I've treated you like a doormat I'm sorry," Dick apologized. He got up and walked out onto the front porch.

That was just like Dick! Whenever he was getting the worst of an argument, he got up and walked away. He was simply maddening!

Well, this was one time when he wouldn't get away with it! She'd walk right out after him, and say what she had to say to him!

Suppose the neighbors did hear it . . . ? They probably had a few family battles themselves, at times.

But just as Gloria opened the screen door to go out, Dick

walked down the front steps and around the house to the back yard.

Gloria ran upstairs and put a touch of rouge on either cheek. Then she followed him out to the garage where he was tinkering with the car.

"Dick," she said in a quiet, even voice, "I can't go on living like this. For three days I've been doing my housework just as well as I know how to do it . . . and I'm willing to go on with it, if you'll only treat me decently. Won't you please?"

Dick turned toward her. He had taken off his coat, and rolled up his sleeves. His hair was ruffled, and there was a smear of grease across his cheek. He looked boyish . . . absurdly boyish.

Gloria took her handkerchief from her apron pocket, and rubbed the grease from his face. Her hand dropped to his shoulder and stayed there.

"Dick," she said, "I'm so unhappy. . . ."

She looked up at him. In the dusk her eyes were black and luminous, her mouth like a dark flower. "I want you to kiss me, Dick," she murmured. "Let's be friends. . . . It's terrible, living at arm's length, this way. . . ."

"Two falcons in a snare," Dick quoted. He moved a step or two away from her.

"Now, just what do you mean by that?" Gloria asked sharply. She hated Dick to quote things that she didn't understand from the books he was forever reading.

He shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter," he said. "But I know, myself, that we can't go on living this way. It's impossible. I see it, too."

Gloria drooped. She braced herself against the side of the garage door.

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" she asked. "Do you want me to leave you? Do you hate me as much as that, Dick?"

He did not answer at once. He took his old pipe from his pocket and filled it.

"It's like this, Gloria," he said finally. "I don't hate you, at all. But Wayburn . . . he's there, between us, somehow. You see, I can't ever kid myself again that you care about me. I know that you'd be in New York with him now, if he'd wanted you to be there. . . . A man doesn't forget a thing

like that. No one but a boob like me would ever have had you in his house again, on any terms. . . ."

"But I didn't do anything wrong!" Gloria defended herself. "What are a few silly kisses?"

Dick sneered.

"Yes . . . I know that's the way you look at it," he said, "but no decent woman would let any man but her husband kiss her, Gloria. She wouldn't soil herself that way."

Gloria tossed her head impatiently. "Oh, you're so old-fashioned," she answered. "Think of all the petting that goes on at wild parties. And it doesn't mean a thing."

"That makes it all the more rotten, then," Dick pointed out. "Love isn't a game or a toy. It's bigger than any of us. . . ."

He broke off abruptly. And when he spoke again his voice was quite cold and matter-of-fact. "Come on, let's go into the house. The mosquitoes are beginning to bite out here." He stooped to scratch his ankle.

They went in. Silently Gloria cleared the table, piled the dishes on the sink, and put the clean milk bottles out on the back porch.

Then she went into the living-room to join Dick. But he didn't look up. He went on reading as if he were all alone in the house. . . . He was utterly unaware of Gloria.

"Well," she said after ten or fifteen minutes had crawled by. "You treat me just as if I were a piece of furniture or something."

Dick closed his book and laid it on the table. "Did you want to talk to me?" he asked.

"Yes," Gloria answered. Her words came with a rush. "I've been thinking over what you said about Stan Wayburn having come between you and me. . . . And yet you keep Miss Briggs working in your office when you know she's in love with you . . . and that I want you to get rid of her!"

Dick gave a short laugh. He picked up his book and opened it.

"If every man, whose wife wanted him to, would fire his stenographer, half the girls in the country would be out of a job to-morrow morning," he said. "No, I'm not going to fire Miss Briggs. Why should I? . . . She's a good worker. I'd have a hard time filling her place."

There was a flick of finality in his voice.

"Very well, you keep her," Gloria answered. "I should worry. I'm going home to my mother to-morrow, anyway."

Dick made no sign that he had heard her.

"You don't care if I go, do you?" she asked, hoping he'd say he did care.

"I want you to do whatever you think will make you happy," Dick said gravely. "You know you can stay here as long as you like. But if you'd rather live with your mother and father, I'll take care of you. I'll send you all the money I can spare, every week. So do as you please."

Gloria tried to smile . . . a poor little smile that barely lifted the corners of her mouth. Her throat swelled, and her eyes ached with unshed tears.

"All right, old dear," she said, trying to make her voice light and careless. But a high note of agony ran through it.

Incredibly she went straight to sleep, her worn-out body throbbing in every nerve. And at dawn the next morning she awoke.

She sat up in bed and looked around her room . . . the familiar room with its wide window-seat, its flowered cushions, and silver picture frames.

To-morrow morning she'd be waking up in the shabby little bedroom in her father's shabby little house. Shuddering, Gloria thought of it . . . the brown spot on the ceiling where the rain had leaked through the roof, the blistered woodwork, the battered iron bed.

How she had always hated that little room that was too cold in the winter, too hot in the summer! And how utterly glad she had been to escape from it, when she had married Dick Gregory!

A tear slid down Gloria's cheek as she thought of all the mornings of her future . . . the lonely awakenings in that little room.

She lay with closed eyes and heard Dick stirring in his room, whistling in his bath, singing "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep," as he dressed.

Later the sound of his car leaving the yard. Then silence. She would not see him again, she knew. . . .

The doorbell rang. Gloria slipped her naked feet into bedroom slippers, threw a kimono around her, and ran downstairs.

Through the net curtains on the front door, she could see May Seymour standing on the porch. What in the world did May want coming at that time of the morning?

"Hello, Gloria, how's every little thing with you?" she asked, as she came into the hall. Her face was white as paper under her black crêpe hat, and there were faint mauve marks under her eyes.

"Fine as silk," Gloria answered, borrowing the brave phrase that her father used when things were at their very worst. "And you . . . How are you, May?"

May tried to answer. Then, suddenly, she collapsed upon a chair, buried her face in her hands, and burst into horrible, shaking sobs.

She opened her handbag and took from it a folded bit torn from a newspaper.

"Read that," she sobbed.

Gloria unfolded the little clipping, curiously.

"Mr. and Mrs. Rodney Millbrook announce the engagement of their daughter, Margot, to Mr. James Neale Carewe, formerly of Boston. The wedding will be an event of late October," it read.

"Jim Carewe engaged!" Gloria cried aloud. "Why, did you ever hear of such a thing! And who's the girl, for goodness' sake?"

May looked up at her with wet, red-rimmed eyes. "She's a little cousin of Myra Gail's," she said. "A young thing just graduated from school this month. She can't be more than twenty . . . and Jim's thirty-six, if he's a minute! Talk about cradle robbing. . . ."

Gloria shook her head slowly. "But, May," she said. "You never cared a snap of your fingers about Jim. I've heard you say so a hundred times. It was always Jim who was wild about you."

"I know it," May answered. "But Jim's like all men. He wants to be respectable. He'd never marry me in a million years since this . . . this scandal about John's . . . suicide."

She pressed her handkerchief hard against her lips for a moment. Then she went on bravely: "This girl can give Jim just what he wants. Respectability, a houseful of friends,

youth . . . everything clean and new and shining. Perhaps he still does care for me, but he's not going to marry a scandal! He's too selfish to do a thing like that! He thinks too much of himself."

She took off her black hat and tossed it down on the hall table.

"You haven't any coffee on the stove, have you?" she asked. "I haven't had any breakfast."

"I haven't had any, either," Gloria answered. "Come out into the kitchen. I won't promise to cook anything for you. But Dick left some coffee on the stove, and there's jelly and rolls."

She stopped and looked hard at May for a minute. "Well, she said. "I guess we're both out of luck, my dear. I'm leaving Dick this morning. We've agreed to disagree. And I'm going back home to my people."

They stood there looking at each other with empty eyes. Neither had a word to say.

It flashed through Gloria's mind that they were like moths dancing around a light. They had flown too close to danger and had had their wings singed and broken. . . .

But Stanley Wayburn and Jim Carewe were safe enough! One married, the other engaged to be married! They had escaped. Men always did.

It was the woman who took all the slurs, the snubs, and the pain. The man went scot-free from one love affair to another. . . .

"Gloria," May said suddenly. "Let's get out of this town! Let's go away where nobody knows us, and start over again . . ."

But Gloria shook her head. "No," she said. "I tried that once. . . . The time I went to New York. And I almost died from homesickness. I . . . I wanted Dick."

May stared at her. "Well, you poor little fish, why are you leaving him, then?" she asked. "If you care anything about him?"

"It's Dick who wants me to go," Gloria answered. "He . . . he's through with me."

"Oh, you're crazy," May answered. "You might tell that to some people, and get away with it! But I know Dick Gregory . . . and he's in love with you, and always has been!"

After May had gone, Gloria thought over what she had said. Was it possible that Dick still loved her?

. . . No, May was wrong. Dick couldn't love her any more, or he wouldn't let her go this way, would he?

All morning as she made the beds and washed the dishes, Gloria listened tensely for the phone to ring. . . . There was just a bare chance that Dick would call her from the office to ask her not to go away from him.

. . . But no, Susan Briggs was at the office. And Dick was completely under her sway. He was probably not even thinking about his wife at home. His wife, packing her trunks to leave his house, forever!

Hadn't Dick said that Miss Briggs was the one person in the world who gave him sympathy and understanding? A man didn't talk that way about a woman unless he was in love with her, Gloria told herself dejectedly.

She locked her trunks, and presently the expressman came for them.

There was nothing more to do . . . no excuse for staying. And still Gloria lingered in the house that had been the House of Dreams for her and Dick . . .

House of Dreams? . . . Heart-break House was more like it!

Gloria laid the key to the front door down on the hall table, where Dick would be sure to find it. She picked up her little handbag, and went out. The door closed behind her. It closed on a chapter of her life . . .

CHAPTER XLIII

THE Sunday after Gloria's return to her father's house, Aunt Dorcas came to dinner. She brought Uncle Henry along with her . . . a small, silent man. He had been married to Aunt Dorcas for twenty-four years. And he showed it.

"I told you that Gloria had left her husband, didn't I, Henry?" Aunt Dorcas asked between bites of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.

Uncle Henry made a tired sound in his throat.

"And a very good thing it was, too," Aunt Dorcas went on. "A very good thing!"

Gloria raised her eyes to her aunt's large, florid face. "Why is it a good thing for a woman to leave her husband?" she asked.

"That's not what I said," Aunt Dorcas answered, sharply. "But in your case it was. When a girl . . . a poor girl . . . marries the son of rich parents, and they treat her as the Gregorys treated you, the best thing she can do is to clear out!"

Gloria looked down at her plate.

"They've been very nice to me . . . both Father and Mother Gregory," she said. "They gave us the money for our honeymoon, you know. And Mother Gregory gave us the family silver for a wedding present."

Aunt Dorcas raised one hand like a traffic policeman. "A-aah!" she cried, "but that was for their son! . . . What did they ever do for you? . . . Did old Mrs. Gregory ever give a party to introduce you to all their high-and-mighty friends? Not she! She left you right out in the cold, as far as I can see!"

Aunt Dorcas folded her hands on her magnificent chest, and looked around, daring any one to deny what she had said.

No one did. The meal came to an end at last.

Gloria followed her father and Uncle Henry out on to the

front porch, leaving her mother and aunt to clear away the dishes.

There were times when she couldn't stand Aunt Dorcas in large doses. . . . To-day was one of them.

She sat down on the front steps, and looked through the Sunday paper. Suddenly the photograph of a house in the advertising section caught her eye. It looked like their house . . . Dick's and hers. It was their house!

"Owner must sell," read the cutline beneath the picture. "Six-room house, with finished attic. Everything in good condition. Good terms if buyer takes furniture. Call Mr. Gregory, Stentorian Building."

So Dick was going to sell the furniture, too! Everything that had been theirs . . . the friendly yellow lamp in the living-room, the cunning white kitchen table, the gold-colored Chinese rug that had lain like sunlight on the floor of the dining-room.

"I suppose he'll sell even the little red smoking-stand I gave him for Christmas," Gloria thought miserably, "and my little tea-wagon!"

The little tea-wagon had been the pride of Gloria's heart. It had looked so homey with its blue tea cups, and the little silver teapot that had been Dick's grandmother's.

"I think I'll telephone Dick and ask him for the little tea-wagon," she made up her mind that night, as she lay in bed.

But when the morning came she did not telephone. She decided to go to Dick's office to ask him for the tea-wagon. She didn't know why . . . but she wanted to see him! She wanted terribly to see him again. . . .

She spent two hours bathing herself, brushing her hair, making herself lovely for Dick's eyes. Her beauty was her only weapon against Miss Briggs. She must keep it bright and shining!

"Thank goodness, I'm still young!" she thought. "Years younger than Miss Briggs, who must be at least thirty."

"After a while I shall be thirty, and call myself twenty-nine," Gloria said to herself. "But I'll bet I won't look like Sue Briggs! So long as there's a grain of powder or an inch of lipstick left in the world, I'll have it, by jinks!"

Her heart was light as she hurried down the street to the street car line. She hummed happily, as women do when they

are going to meet the man they love . . . But did she love Dick? She didn't know. She knew only that in a few minutes she would be seeing him again. That was enough.

. . . She had hardly stepped from the street car when she did see him. He was not ten feet away from her, walking along the pavement. And beside him, looking up into his eyes, was Susan Briggs!

Gloria's one fear was that the two might see her.

Quickly, as if she were fleeing, she ran across the sidewalk, and into a drugstore. She sat down at the soda fountain and ordered a chocolate sundae.

When it came, the sight of it made her ill. She paid her check and hurried out into the fresh air and the sunshine.

. . . Thank goodness, Dick and Miss Briggs were nowhere in sight!

"I suppose they're having lunch somewhere, together," Gloria thought, with a pang of self-pity. She walked along, not knowing or caring where she was going . . .

Then a poster outside a moving picture theater caught her eye. "Jealous Wives"—the words flamed out of it.

Gloria smiled grimly to herself. "I'm one of them," she thought. "I think I'll go in, and see what it's all about."

She went into the dark, cool cavern of the theater. She sank gratefully into a chair. . . . Ah, it was good to be here, alone! Away from her mother's disappointed eyes, her father's kindness, from Aunt Dorcas' sharp tongue . . . away from everybody.

There was no sound in the theater except the whirring of a huge electric fan in the center of the ceiling. Down in the orchestra pit, the organist was turning the leaves of his music.

The picture flashed on the screen. Against it Gloria could see the silhouette of a man who sat directly in front of her . . . Dick!

She leaned over to touch him upon the shoulder. Then caught herself. . . . No, he would have to come to her! She was through begging him to take her back. . . .

But there was a certain cold comfort in the thought that he was not with Miss Briggs, at any rate. She must have merely walked out of the building with him on her way to lunch.

Gloria was glad of that. The thought that Dick could give

her up for a plain woman like Susan Briggs had added to her cup of bitterness. Perhaps, after all, he didn't care so very much for her.

Suddenly Dick shifted a little in his seat. Gloria held her breath. Suppose he should turn around and see her there! . . . He would think that she had followed him into the theater.

No, he mustn't think that. She would never give him another chance to think she wanted him to take her back. . . . She was through!

Softly she slipped from her chair, and walked out of the twilight of the theater.

But a great loneliness dropped down on her like a cloud, as she went out into the thronged street. How lonely a crowd could make you feel. . . .

Gloria turned away from the center of the town. She walked along familiar streets. She knew where she was going. . . . Home!

Not to her mother's house, but to the little place that had been Dick's and hers! She was going to that forbidden place . . . the one spot on the whole wide earth where she felt at home.

How cozy and happy the little green and white house looked as Gloria came down the street toward it! It seemed to twinkle a welcome to her with all of its shining windows.

. . . But in the center of the green lawn was a real estate agent's "For Sale" sign. Gloria had a sudden impulse to pull up the sign, as she might have torn a weed out of the lawn. . . .

"Hello, there, lady!" a voice hailed her.

Her neighbor, Mrs. Donberg, was leaning out of one of the second-floor windows of the house next door.

"I was thinking of calling up the real estate people to ask them to show me through your house," she said in her shrill voice. "But now that you're here you can let me in. I'll be right over!"

Gloria eyed her coldly. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Donberg," she said, "but I haven't any key with me. I—I just came to pick some of the roses in the back yard. . . . Were you thinking of buying the house?"

"Well, we'd love to have it. It's a little bigger than ours," Mrs. Donberg answered.

Gloria knew perfectly well that she had no thought of

buying the house. "She just wants to look through it, to see all my things! . . . The big busy-body!" she told herself angrily, as she walked around to the back yard.

She didn't want Mrs. Donberg poking around her house! She didn't want any one to look through her house! . . . And the thought that some one would presently buy it and live in it was unbearable to Gloria.

Why, it belonged to her . . . that house! She had picked out every scrap of wall paper in it . . . every stick of furniture! What right had Dick to sell her house . . . ?

"I'm going in," Gloria made up her mind, suddenly.

On the grass lay a clothes pole. Gloria put the sharp iron end of it under one of the sunroom windows. Using it as a lever she finally managed to get the window open.

She laughed aloud when she stood in the sunroom. "No wonder there are so many burglars, if housebreaking is as easy as this!" she thought.

She sat down at the piano and ran her hands lightly along the keys in the opening bars of Offenbach's "Barcarolle."

"No," she thought, springing up, "I'd better not play that thing. . . . It always makes me want to cry. . . ."

She knew that she was on the very edge of tears.

Who would have thought, a year ago, that she could ever have felt this way about a silly old house?

Gloria looked around her. There was Dick's chair . . . and the reading lamp swung above it. There was the little red smoking-stand she had given him. The tray on it was filled with fine gray ash.

. . . She closed her eyes. She could see him sitting there, with a book in his hands, smoking his old pipe! . . .

Ah, it wasn't the house that Gloria was homesick for, she knew, at last. It was Dick she wanted! Dick!

She dropped into his chair, and laid her head back against the brocade where his head had rested. Tears filled her throat, burned behind her closed eyelids.

"I mustn't cry!" she told herself. "I mustn't let myself feel this way about him! It's going to break my heart, if I do . . ."

But the house was alive with Dick.

The table where he had made little marks by knocking out his pipe, the writing desk, the magazines piled on one broad arm of his chair spoke of him.

Gloria shook herself, and went upstairs. Her feet made no sound upon the steps. She felt dreadfully alone.

On the threshold of Dick's room she paused. His bed was still just as she had left it . . . made up with clean linen and the best embroidered pillow-cases. He had not slept at home then, at all! He must be living again with Mother and Father Gregory.

Gloria looked into the clothes closet. Yes, his clothes were all gone.

The top of his dresser was bare. The drawers were empty. The books had been taken from the little bookcase that stood beside Dick's bed.

But on it stood a large framed photograph of Gloria herself in her wedding dress. So Dick had not cared to take that along with him to his father's house!

"Well, who could blame him?" thought Gloria. "I don't suppose he has many happy memories of me, after all. . . ."

Now that she stopped to think of it, there had been more storm than sunshine in their life together.

"And the whole thing has been my fault," Gloria told herself sternly. It was the truth . . . and it hurt.

She turned to look at herself in the glass, as a judge might have looked at a prisoner.

She put herself on trial. . . . She knew she had done none of the things a good wife ought to do for her husband.

She had never taken care of his house . . . never looked after his comfort. She had told him bluntly that she would never give him a family. Children were too great a bother. . . .

She had not even been utterly faithful to him; hadn't she let Stanley Wayburn make love to her? . . .

As Gloria stood there before the glass, the telephone rang.

It startled her. She had supposed Dick would have had the phone taken out of the house. . . . He must have forgotten it.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello, Gloria," May Seymour answered her. "So you didn't leave home after all?"

"I did," Gloria said. "I just came back here this afternoon for a few minutes . . . to get some things I had forgotten. I'm staying at my mother's house, you know."

"Wait there for me a few minutes, will you?" May asked. "I'll be right over. I want to talk to you."

"All right," Gloria replied listlessly. "Only hurry. I want to get out of this place. It's spooky."

The truth was that she didn't want to see May. She didn't want her in the house. She wanted to be alone there, for a while . . . to think things out.

She heard May laugh mirthlessly. "Spooky?" she repeated. "If you think your house is spooky, you ought to spend a night here in mine. It's fairly haunted. . . . Good-by."

Gloria shuddered as she hung the receiver on its hook. She wondered how May stayed there in the house where Dr. John had killed himself. . . .

She ran downstairs to see if there were any cigarettes in the silver box on Dick's smoking-stand. May loved a smoke, occasionally . . .

There were a half dozen cigarettes in the box. Gloria stood looking at them, for a minute. Then she picked them up and threw them into the empty grate.

No, she made up her mind, she would never smoke again! She was through doing the things that Dick said no nice woman would do!

Even though he should never know it, she would become the kind of wife he had always wanted her to be!

Gloria stood at the window watching for May to drive up in her little crimson car.

But she came in a taxicab. And the driver followed her up the front walk, carrying two large traveling bags.

The instant she set foot in the house, Gloria saw that there was some subtle change in her. She was not the crushed and tearful May of a week ago.

The air of dash and impudence that had been her chief charm had returned to her. She had reddened her lips, and around the collar of her soft black dress was a row of little pearls.

"Don't look so surprised," she said to Gloria as she sank into Dick's chair. "I told you 'way last week that I was going to shake the dust of this town from my shoes, didn't I?"

"Yes," Gloria nodded, "but I had no idea that you were going so soon . . ."

"Why should I stay here?" May asked. "There's nothing for me in this burg that I can see! Nothing but a lot of friends who've stopped speaking to me and a story that I'll never be able to live down . . ."

"Where are you going?" Gloria asked.

May threw out her hands with a vague gesture. "New York, London . . . Paris . . . Bombay. Who knows?" she asked. "Thank heaven, I have enough money to keep me going! Going, going . . . that's the only way for me to keep from losing my mind, I guess."

She stopped speaking, and stared out of the window, as if her eyes were filled with long distances already . . .

"Why don't you go with me, Gloria?" she asked suddenly. "That's what I came here to ask you. . . . You know, you'll never go back to Dick now that you've actually left him, don't you?"

Gloria nodded, without a word.

"Well, then," May went on, "tell him you want some money and come along with me. I'm going to stay at a hotel to-night, and take an early train in the morning. You could get ready to go by then, couldn't you?"

Gloria looked at her thoughtfully. The idea tempted her. What was this dull town to her, now that she had lost Dick?

"For two pins . . . for two little rusty, bent pins. . . I'd go with you, May," she said slowly. "But, somehow or other, I just can't do it. As long as Dick's here . . . I've got to stay I guess. . . ."

"What I can't understand," May answered, with a little frown on her face, "is how Dick ever happened to let you pick up and leave him."

Her eyes questioned Gloria.

"Oh, I guess he just got tired of me," Gloria said with a break in her voice. "He wanted a home-keeping wife. And I wasn't one. I bored him."

"Bored him? Never! . . . Not with that face of yours!" May exclaimed.

"Oh, blah! Men get tired of nothing but a woman's looks," Gloria told her. "You can get them with your beauty. But you've got to hold them with something else. . . . Brains, for one thing. And love and care."

"Love and care! You talk about them as if they were babies!" May laughed.

"Well, and so they are! They're only grown-up children," Gloria went on, with that new wisdom of hers. "When life bangs them on the head, they want some one to rub the bump,

and tell them not to mind . . . And they want their food right on the dot, poor things, just as a baby does!"

She stopped and shook a solemn forefinger at May.

"And you flip it from the Flapper, that the wife who wins is the one who mothers her man," she said. "I used to think that what Dick wanted was a playmate. And all of the time he wanted some one to take his troubles to . . . some one to mother him!"

May's red lips curled. "Don't kid yourself that you were ever Dick's playmate, dearie," she said sarcastically. "All the playing around you did was with Stan Wayburn, it seemed to me. . . ."

Gloria flushed. "I know it," she admitted. "I know I wasn't . . . anything to Dick. I just fell down on my job. No wonder he doesn't want me any more . . ." She burst into tears.

May looked at her thoughtfully.

"Well, if you're sure Dick's through with you, what are you sticking around here for?" she asked. "Believe me, I'd go to see a lawyer so fast it would make your head swim!"

"Go to see a lawyer?" Gloria echoed faintly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean . . . get a divorce," May answered. "What's the use of being tied to a man who doesn't care a snap of his fingers about you? You say Dick doesn't."

Gloria put her head on one side like a wise robin.

"We-ell, I don't know, May," she mused. "Divorce has always seemed a terrible thing to me . . ."

"No more terrible than the way you're living now!" May answered briskly. "You're neither married nor single!"

Gloria sighed. "I'm awfully lonely," she said sadly.

May got up to go. "Oh, you make me sick!" she exclaimed. "If I cared about a man I'll bet I'd make him care about me . . . or know the reason why! Why don't you go to Dick and tell him you're going to divorce him? That'll bring him 'round, fast enough!"

"Nothing will do that," Gloria answered. "I tell you he's through with me! I know Dick . . . when he says he's through he means it!"

She sat staring into space while May telephoned for a taxicab to take herself and her bags down to the hotel.

She drew a long breath of pure relief when May had gone,

and she stood alone in the house once more . . . the dear, familiar house.

Gloria hated to leave it. She had told May it was "spooky." It was not "spooky" . . . except that it was haunted with memory. Gloria could almost feel Dick with her in the empty room.

She ran out into the back yard and picked a bouquet of roses. She put them in a vase on the table beside Dick's chair. She drew his little smoking-stand up beside it. There was dust on it. . . .

Gloria wiped it off with her clean handkerchief.

CHAPTER XLIV

"WHERE have you been all day?" her mother asked her when she walked into the hot little kitchen at six o'clock that night.

"Oh . . . I don't know. Gadding around town," Gloria answered. "I know I'm dead tired. . . ." She dropped down on a chair beside the kitchen table.

Her mother was bent above the gas stove. She was frying veal birds for supper.

Her face was flushed. Her hair curled in little damp wisps around her ears. There was a weary droop at the corners of her mouth.

Gloria jumped up. "I'm going to get supper to-night," she cried, "just to show you that I can do it! . . . I'll be down in a jiffy!"

She hurried upstairs to the little bedroom under the eaves. It was close and stuffy, although the one window was opened wide, and the muslin curtains looped back.

Gloria ripped off her silk dress, and put on her new bungalow apron . . . the apron in which she had planned to look so pretty for Dick!

She ran down to the kitchen. Her father had come in. He was sitting in his shirtsleeves beside the door that led to the back porch.

"To-day's been a corker, hasn't it?" he asked. "I tell you, I thought I was going to drop dead as I walked down the street this noon. The paper said some fellow died of sun-stroke . . ."

"You and Mother go out on the porch while I slap this meal together, Dad," Gloria said. "Now, come on . . . you make Mother go! You know she thinks no one but herself knows how to do anything . . ."

Mrs. Gordon hung back. "I know you don't know how to cook a meal," she said. "It seems a shame to spoil good food!"

"It would be a good thing if I did spoil it to-night," Gloria

answered. "People shouldn't eat anything but salad and green vegetables in weather like this!"

Alone in the kitchen, she set to work. The lettuce was lying in a bowl of water. Gloria cut it up and made a French dressing for it. Mother Gregory had shown her how to mix the oil and lemon juice to silken smoothness.

Gloria wondered what Mother Gregory had ordered for dinner at their house to-night. Would Dick be there with his father and mother? . . . Or would he be dining somewhere or other with Susan Briggs?

Gloria wrinkled her forehead. "Well, I can't live like this . . . worrying myself to death about him all the time. Wondering where he is, and what he's doing," she told herself. "Perhaps May's right. Perhaps I'd be happier if I divorced Dick . . ."

She debated the question with herself as she set the meal on the table. With unseeing eyes she smiled at her mother and father when they praised it.

She was looking far away into the hidden future. What did it hold for a woman who had separated from the only man in the world for whom she cared? . . .

Her mother's voice roused her from her dream. "Oh, I forgot," she said in her slow, soft voice. "A letter came for you this afternoon while you were out. I guess it's from Dick."

Gloria's heart beat fast. A telegram coming in the dead of night couldn't have startled her more than this letter from Dick . . . What was in it? What did he have to say to her?

Her fingers pressed the envelope. There seemed to be several folds of paper within it.

But without opening it, Gloria slipped it into her apron pocket. She could feel the eyes of her father and mother watching her. She knew that they were waiting for her to open the letter . . . to tell them what Dick had written.

But, somehow or other, she wanted to be all alone when she read that letter—

There was just a wild chance that Dick was asking her to come back to him, in it. "And if he wants me, I'll go home this very night!" Gloria promised herself.

She raised her eyes to the cuckoo clock that hung above the sideboard. Half past seven! . . . In another hour or two she might be in Dick's arms again!

With an effort she went on talking: "I saw May Seymour this afternoon, Mother. She's going to leave town. Says she'll never come back here as long as she lives."

Gloria's mother forgot all about the letter in this exciting piece of news.

"Well, I should just think she would go away! I should think she'd be ashamed to show her face among decent people, anywhere!" she said, with spirit. "I always told you she was no good, didn't I? . . . What was the name of that man she used to run around with, right under her poor husband's nose?"

"Jim Carewe," Gloria answered. "And what do you think? He's going to be married to some little girl just out of school, next fall. The engagement was announced in the paper the other day."

An expression that plainly said "I told you so!" flashed across Mrs. Gordon's face. She was "Mrs. Grundy" herself, at that moment.

"I never saw it fail to happen!" she cried. "Men will run around and have a good time with women like May Seymour. But when they settle down, they marry some girl who still thinks the moon's made of green cheese!"

Gloria laughed.

"Mother, you amuse me," she said. "Nobody thinks the moon's made of green cheese, any more. Flappers of seventeen know more than their grandmothers knew at seventy."

Mrs. Gordon shook her head. "Of course, if you think that knowing how to shimmy or roll a cigarette is knowing anything, you're right," she said, "but we old-fashioned women weren't so slow. When I was your age I could run a house all myself . . . washing, ironing, baking. Everything!"

"Yes, and she used to make all my shirts, too," Gloria's father added, mildly. "And your little dresses, Gloria. Remember how cute she used to look in those pink gingham dresses, Mother?"

Mrs. Gordon nodded. Her blue eyes filled with tears as she looked across the table at Gloria. This was a terrible thing for her . . . this breach between Gloria and Dick. Like a death in the family, almost!

That this should have happened to her little Gloria! The little daughter for whom she had worked and prayed for twenty years. . . .

Gloria read her mother's thoughts. She carried her dishes out into the kitchen, and then ran upstairs to her tiny bedroom.

With shaking fingers she tore open the envelope.

She took out the paper that was in it . . . a double sheet, folded around a check. A check for \$50. That was all.

There wasn't a word written on the paper . . . not a word! Just the money . . . the check. As if money were all she wanted!

"So that's the letter I've been having chills and fever about, for the last fifteen minutes! . . . Nothing but a measly check!" she said, ruefully.

She sank down on the edge of her bed, turning the slip of paper over and over in her fingers. Then she looked into the envelope once more . . . just to make sure that there was no letter from Dick in it. But there was none.

Gloria tore the envelope into tiny pieces, and flung the check down on her dresser. That bit of paper . . . It was the death to her hopes!

For until that moment, Gloria had been telling herself that . . . sooner or later . . . Dick would want her for his wife again.

Even when he had put the house up for sale, she had comforted herself with the thought that he wouldn't sell it when it came to a show-down.

But this check . . . this \$50 . . . looked as if he really was through with her, forever. He had probably made up his mind to send her that much money every week for the rest of her life. It . . . it was alimony!

In his own mind, Dick was divorced from her. . . . What else could that check mean?

Gloria opened the door of her stuffy little bedroom and called downstairs: "Oh, Mother! Come up here a minute. I want to show you something!"

When her mother came, Gloria held out the check to her without a word. She watched her as she looked at it . . . wondering if her mother had been pretty when she was young.

Lines of worry fretted her forehead now, and her hair was gray above her temples. Wrinkles dragged down the corners of her mouth.

Gloria turned suddenly and looked at her own face in the dim mirror of her old dresser. Her own mouth was dragged

down like her mother's . . . and tremulous at the corners. Her eyebrows were twisted with unhappiness!

"I'll look like an old hag soon, if I don't stop worrying and fussing about Dick," she told herself angrily. She scooped up some cold cream from the jar on the dresser, and patted it around her mouth.

"Well, Mother, what do you think of my love letter from Dick?" she asked with flippant sarcasm.

Mrs. Gordon stroked the check with her work-worn hands.

"I've always said," she began slowly, "that there would be fewer divorces in the world if there were less alimony! If a woman knew that she'd have to go to work to support herself, she wouldn't be so ready to leave her husband as most wives are, nowadays. . . . What are you going to do with that check, Gloria?"

"I don't know. Get it cashed, I suppose," Gloria answered. "I ought to give some of the money to you and Dad for my board. . . . Why do you ask?"

"Because if I were you, I'd send it straight back to Dick," her mother said. "You've no right to his money."

Gloria's eyes opened like sea-flowers. "I'd like to know who has a better right to it!" she cried. "I'm his wife and if he doesn't live with me, the least he can do is support me!"

Mrs. Gordon shook her head. "No, if you had a child or two to care for, I'd tell you to take Dick's money," she said. "But you're a free, able-bodied woman who can earn her own living. . . . And it's not fair to take money from a man when you're not being a wife to him. Can't you see that, yourself?"

"I certainly can't!" Gloria replied. "Dick's been my husband for a long time, and he's got to pay for it!" Her little chin was firm and hard.

She stood suddenly. "Come on, let's go downstairs. I'll wipe the dishes for you," she offered.

In silence they cleared away the dishes, and set to work to wash them.

They had almost finished when Gloria's father came in from the back yard, where he had been sprinkling his little garden.

"Well, what are you two so quiet about?" he asked.

Gloria laughed shakily.

"I had a windfall. Dick sent me \$50," she answered, "and Mother and I don't know what to do with it."

Her father came over to her and laid his hands tenderly on her shoulders.

"Don't touch a nickel of his money," he said. He felt that whatever the trouble was between Dick and Gloria, it couldn't be his "baby girl's" fault. So in his own mind he blamed Dick for her unhappiness.

"We took care of you for twenty years, daughter," he went on. "I guess we can do it a while longer. . . . You send his money back to him."

Gloria looked thoughtful. "Do you know, I believe I will," she said suddenly. "To-morrow morning I'll get up early, and hunt a job. Thank goodness, I know how to earn a few dollars!"

But she was filled with sadness that night, as she sat in her room, looking out into the dark street. Behind her on the dresser, the alarm clock ticked loudly. It was set for six o'clock in the morning.

"Back to the old grind!" Gloria said to herself, miserably.

It had always been hard for Gloria Gordon to rouse herself at break of day, and go out to work long dreary hours. How much more difficult it was going to be for Mrs. Richard Gregory, who had had her breakfasts in bed for many months . . . who had had her own home, her own automobile!

Gloria couldn't eat the poached eggs and toast that her mother cooked for her the next morning. She looked through the "Help Wanted" columns of the paper as she sipped her coffee.

"Here's an ad that looks pretty good to me," she said to her mother. "'Wanted: Experienced stenographer, with knowledge of bookkeeping. Good salary.'"

The address was that of a real estate firm in a downtown building.

"I think I'll go there," Gloria made up her mind. "It may be the very place I want."

But when she got off the street car in the downtown district, she did not turn toward the office of the real estate firm.

Instead, she went straight to Dick's office, with the eager swiftness of a homing pigeon.

She pushed open the door and stepped inside. Dick and

Miss Briggs stood talking beside the desk in the inner room.

They looked up in surprise as Gloria came toward them. She did not even glance at Susan Briggs.

"Hello, Dick," she said. He did not answer.

Gloria turned then, and looked straight at Miss Briggs. "I want to talk to my husband. Will you please leave us alone?" she asked coldly.

The secretary did not meet Gloria's eyes. But she walked slowly out of the office. The door closed behind her.

Gloria opened her handbag and laid the check Dick had sent her down upon his desk.

"There's your money. I've brought it back to you," she said. "I don't want anything from you, Dick."

She raised her questioning eyes to his face. "What was the big idea of sending it to me?" she asked.

Under her eyes, Dick flushed darkly. Gloria could see that he was embarrassed.

"I thought you understood that I was going to take care of you," he said. "I told you that if you lived with your folks, I'd see that you had plenty of money. . . . I'll send you \$50 every week, just as I said I would."

Gloria shook her head. "No, you won't," she contradicted, "because I shan't take it. I'm going back to work this morning. I'll earn my own money. . . . So you can keep yours to pay off some of the debts I piled up for you!"

She couldn't resist saying that. The memory of Dick's sermons about debts was still a thorn in her flesh.

"I'll send you a check for \$50 every week, just as I said I would," Dick repeated firmly. "So long as you're my wife, I'm going to support you. And I don't want you to work in some office with a lot of men. . . ."

Gloria interrupted him with a laugh. "I'm not your wife any more," she cried. "The law may say I am, and you may say so! But I'm not!"

Her face was white, and hard with rebellion. "And another thing . . . I'll work anywhere I please! And it'll take more than you to stop me!" she added.

Dick was speechless. As he stood there looking at her, without a word to say, she began to cry.

Tears reddened her eyes and coursed down through the rouge that was thick on her cheeks. Her mouth trembled.

"Dick," she began huskily, "I've been so lonesome. And look. . . ." She held out her hands to show him the burns and cuts on them.

"See, I've been trying to cook," she sobbed. "Dick, please let me go home again. . . . I can't stand being away from you. I can't stand it!"

Her voice rose on a high note of hysteria.

"Sssh!" Dick hissed, frowning. "Be careful or Miss Briggs will hear you! Hush!"

Gloria sank down on the floor and laid her head on the seat of Dick's swivel chair. "What do I care if she hears me or not!" she said thickly. "All I care about is getting home, again!"

"Please, please don't treat me like this," she sobbed.

Dick lifted her to her feet. "For Lord's sake, get up!" he said sharply. "And don't come here again, until you can control yourself, Gloria! . . . What are you trying to do? Put on a one-act play for Miss Briggs' benefit?"

His sharpness brought Gloria to her senses. She stood up and dried her eyes.

"All you think about is Miss Briggs, isn't it?" she asked, choking. "And what is she, anyway! Nothing but a little old maid! . . . I wouldn't care so much if I'd lost you to a raving, tearing beauty. . . ."

Her voice broke again.

She almost ran out of the office.

CHAPTER XLV

THE women's dressing-room was on the floor below. Gloria hurried down to it.

Two pretty office girls were there, chatting as they combed out their fluffy bobbed hair, as they rouged their lips . . . preparing for the morning's labor.

They looked at Gloria's tear-stained face curiously, as she came in. She bathed her red eyes and hot cheeks with icy water. Then she carefully powdered her face, added a touch of color to her cheeks.

In the mirror, she could see the two girls looking at the expensive bead bag and gold vanity case she had laid on the marble shelf below the mirror.

"Don't envy me," she wanted to say to them. "I'm just a working girl like you are. Only I'm out of a job!"

Out in the street the sun was high, and shining with a white blistering glare. It was ten o'clock.

The army of office girls had disappeared from the street . . . and those other workers . . . the home women, were abroad in their crisp wash dresses and white shoes.

"I was one of them once," Gloria thought regretfully. "But I didn't know my luck when I had it!"

. . . She was furious with herself for going to Dick's office.

"I suppose it tickled Briggs to death when I came out, crying!" she said to herself between clenched teeth.

Then, with her chin up and her head held high, she went into the real estate office of Forbes, Forgan and Fargo.

She found her knees trembling, and her breath coming fast with nervousness as she followed an office boy into the presence of Ulysses X. Forgan.

He was a man growing elderly. Rather sparse brown hair streaked with gray, two hard brown eyes with pockets of wrinkles under them, a high nose, and a mouth like the slot in a gum-machine . . . that was Ulysses X. Forgan.

He had a mind like an adding-machine. He seldom thought

of anything but figures. They were to him what talk and laughter were to other men.

The one quality he had that made him human was his love of beauty. . . . He loved it in the impersonal way that the Greeks worshiped it.

And Gloria with her amber eyes and tremulous mouth was beautiful that morning. Ulysses X. Forgan looked at her as he might have looked at a painting in a museum.

He hired her. "Worth looking at even if she can't type-write," he said to himself. "And she probably can't. The good lookers are all dumb-bells.

But as the days went by, he realized that Gloria knew her business. And she began to study his. She would slip just the paper he happened to be looking for under his nose just when he wanted it.

"I may have been a failure as a wife," she told herself Saturday when she took her pay envelope from the cashier, "but I've always been a crackerjack business woman! . . . Maybe it's the thing I was cut out for, after all!"

She had a vision of herself in the coming years, growing large and sharp-eyed and efficient . . . a successful business woman with nothing to live for but a job!

It was a gray and dreary outlook. . . .

When she went home that afternoon, she took a leisurely bath and curled up on her bed for a nap. It was six o'clock when she awoke.

Her hair was damp with perspiration, and it curled around her ears and forehead. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were starry as a baby's when it awakens from its afternoon sleep.

She looked in the glass. . . . No, she wasn't the type of woman to be unmarried, to live alone. She was too beautiful for that.

. . . Down in the kitchen she could hear her mother at work, getting supper. She dressed herself in a gingham housefrock and went down to help with the meal.

Gloria sliced the cold veal loaf, and quartered lemons for the pitcher of iced tea. She made a plateful of lettuce sandwiches. "Thank goodness we aren't having anything hot to eat," she said cheerfully to her mother. "It's sweltering, isn't it? . . . Look at those sandwiches! I'm getting to be some housewife, eh, what?"

She laughed brightly. But her thoughts were anything but cheerful. . . .

This was Saturday night. Carnival for everybody! . . . The end of the long week's work. . . .

All over America girls were waving their hair, and dressing themselves in their best bib and tucker, to go out "stepping." Wives were hurrying with the supper dishes, so that they might not make their families late for the "movies."

Everybody, everywhere, had something special to do.

"Everybody but me," Gloria said to herself, as she sat out in the porch swing, after supper.

She stared out into the gathering dusk. The stars were coming out, like polished pin points in the sky above the tree tops.

A Ford car drove up before the house next door, and a man jumped out and ran up the steps. Gloria heard a screen door slam. . . .

Presently he came out again, with the girl who lived there . . . little Peggy Quin.

"My stars! She can't be more than sixteen . . . and having a beau already!" Gloria exclaimed to herself. "But then, that's not so bad, when I'm only twenty-one, and married and—" She stopped suddenly. She had almost said "divorced."

With a pang of loneliness, she listened to Peggy Quin's gay voice, as she climbed into the little car and took her seat there, It chugged away down the street. . . .

Then her mother and father came out of the house. They were going out to do their regular Saturday night marketing.

"Better come along," Mr. Gordon advised her. "We'll probably wind up at a movie. We 'most always do."

But Gloria shook her head. "No, thanks, darlings," she said, "I'm too comfortable to move. . . ."

She watched them go down the street together. What children they were, starting off on their innocent spree! . . . After all, it wasn't what you did that made life interesting. It was the people with whom you did them, who counted!

Her mother and father . . . they were happy because they had each other.

. . . Inside the dark house, the telephone rang.

Gloria quivered. Who could it be? Dick, perhaps! . . . But no, it was only Aunt Dorcas, very likely, or Cousin Lulu,

"Hello," she said languidly into the transmitter.

A man's crisp voice answered her. "Miss Gordon?" it asked. "Is this Miss Gordon?" the voice asked again.

Gloria knew at once that it must belong to Ulysses X. Forgan. She had given her name to him as "Gloria Gordon" when she started to work in his office.

"Yes. . . . It's Mr. Forgan, isn't it?" she asked.

His voice sounded pleased when he answered. "It is. . . . Thanks for recognizing me," he said. "I wonder if I could see you for a few minutes? Perhaps you'd like to go for a little drive. . . ."

Almost without thinking, Gloria answered: "Of course . . . I'd love to go!"

The thought of a drive on this sweltering night was refreshing . . . just to lean back against the cushions of a car, and feel the wind in her face! It would be heavenly. . . .

"But I can't go! What was I thinking about when I said I would?" Gloria suddenly asked herself. She was halfway up the stairs, on her way to get dressed for the drive.

But she turned and went back to her corner of the porch swing.

Here she was, a married woman, going driving with her "boss!" What would people think of her if they found out that she had done such a thing! What would Dick think? . . . He would never forgive her! But then, he was through with her forever, anyway. . . .

After all, what difference did it make to anybody what she did?

Nobody cared. . . . Here she was alone and deserted by every one in the world! On Saturday night, too!

She stood up, suddenly. "I just will go!" she said to herself. "I'll have every bit of fun that comes my way! . . . What's the diff?"

If she couldn't have love, she could still have gayety!

But her decision came too late. She wasn't dressed!

Just then the headlights of an automobile swung down the street. They threw their white glare into Gloria's face, as Ulysses X. Forgan turned his car and stopped it before the little house.

Gloria watched him come up the walk to the front steps. She could see that he was in a light suit, and carried a straw hat.

She welcomed him from the shadows of the vine-hung porch.

"How do you do? . . . Would you mind very much if we didn't go for a drive?" she asked.

In the light that shone from the hall of the house, Ulysses Forgan could see that she was in a gingham housedress.

Gloria laughed. "All dressed up and no place to go!" she said gayly. "That's what I'm not! . . . Won't you sit down?"

But he stood where he was, turning his hat in his hands. "Are you sure you don't want to go for a drive?" he asked. "It's a wonderful night, Miss Gordon."

Miss Gordon! . . . Gloria knew this was the moment to tell him that she was not "Miss Gordon," but "Mrs. Richard Gregory." But somehow she couldn't bring herself to do it.

"After all it's none of his business," she thought.

. . . And yet, it was his business! To work for a man under your maiden name was one thing. To have him come as a caller . . . an admirer . . . thinking that you were unmarried, was quite another.

"Mr. Forgan," Gloria said, and her voice trembled a little, "I'm not 'Miss Gordon.' I'm married . . . separated from my husband. I should have told you, before. . . ."

Even in the darkness she could feel his eyes on her . . . shocked and startled. "You certainly should have told me!" he said sharply. "It's not my habit to become friendly with young women who work for me. . . . And if I had known you were married. . . ."

"Better let me explain," Gloria broke in. "My . . . my husband didn't want me to work. He provides me with money, but I won't take it from him. So it seemed to me unfair to let people know that his wife was out earning her own living . . . as long as I really don't have to do it. Do you see?"

He didn't answer. There was a long, heavy silence.

Then Gloria spoke again. "I'm afraid I won't be able to work for you, after this. . . . Good-by, Mr. Forgan," she said quietly, and held out her hand.

He took his dismissal without a word . . . just pressed her hand and went away. Gloria watched the red tail-light of his car disappear into the darkness.

"Poor, lonely old bird!" she said to herself. "With his sporty clothes and racy car trying to kid himself that he's still young and gay!"

She almost wished that she had gone for a drive with Ulysses X. It couldn't have done any one any real harm, could it? And he had seemed pathetic in his loneliness. . . .

But no, she couldn't have any men friends . . . married, as she was! . . . Of course, there would always be men who'd fall in love with her, so long as she was young and kept her looks. But she never would want any of them. . . .

There was only one thing in the world that meant anything to her . . . one thing that she really wanted. And that was Dick's love. But she had found it out too late!

She'd lost it, and it never would come again. . . .

"I wonder where Dick is to-night," Gloria wondered.

. . . Perhaps he was having dinner somewhere with Susan Briggs.

Gloria thought of the little dinners she and Dick had had in restaurants. How he had resented the admiring glances of men who stared at her.

She giggled, in spite of her heartache: "Well, that's one thing he won't have to worry about when he's with Miss Briggs!" she thought. "No one would look at her twice. She's as homely as a mud fence!"

There was undeniable comfort in the thought of Miss Briggs' plainness. . . .

CHAPTER XLVI

BUT Dick was not having dinner with Susan Briggs that night.

He was not having dinner with any one.

At the very moment when Gloria was wishing Ulysses X. Forgan good-night and good-by, he was tearing along green country lanes in the little car he had bought for her.

He came back to town against the wind. It set the blood racing in his veins, and burned his face. It was good to be challenged by the wind . . . to defy it with his own speed.

All day he had been "blue" . . . low in his mind. Everything in his life, lately, seemed to have gone stale and flat. . . .

It was nine o'clock when he got back to town. He drove down the street toward home.

"Home" these days meant his mother's perfectly ordered house. Perfectly cooked meals . . . always on time.

His ties were always pressed and folded neatly in his drawers. His socks were always mended. There was never a single button missing from his shirts.

But, nevertheless, there was something distinctly missing from his life. He didn't know just what it was, either.

. . . As Dick swung his car into the driveway, he saw that another car was parked there. His father and mother evidently had guests.

He backed the car out of the drive. The thought of talking to a roomful of people was intolerable to him just then.

A half hour later he was in the kitchen of his own house. He had tied a clean dish-towel around his waist for an apron.

He held a can opener in one hand and a tin of baked beans in the other. And he was getting his own dinner. A wedge of Yorkstate cheese, a loaf of rye bread, and a baker's pie were on the kitchen table.

For this "delicatessen" meal, Dick had foregone chicken pie and raspberry shortcake at his mother's house that night.

He had come home straight from the office to get his car. And then he had driven out into the open country. . . . Like all people who are beset with loneliness, he had wanted to be alone.

But he was cheerful enough now, puttering around his own house . . . the house where Gloria had so lately been. He ate his cold, indigestible food with gusto. He whistled as he rinsed his dishes and piled them up on the drainboard.

Then he took his "General Dawes" pipe from his pocket, and went into the living-room. He switched on the lights there, and stopped short, staring.

There was a vase of wilted roses on the table that stood beside his armchair. They had not been there a week ago! . . . His smoking-stand was in perfect order.

And beside it on the floor lay a square of crumpled cambric . . . Gloria's handkerchief. She had been in the house! . . . She had come back! But why? . . . And when?

And how had she managed to get in without a key? Dick tried the living-room windows. They were all locked. Then he went into the sunroom.

He saw at once the window that Gloria had pried open. There were marks on the window sill where the clothes pole had scraped it. . . .

Dick sat down in his armchair, and looked at the handkerchief in his hands. The initial "G" was embroidered in one corner of it. And it smelled faintly of mimosa flowers.

He put it against his nostrils, and the perfume of it brought back to him the memory of Gloria so keenly that it seemed she must still be there in the room with him!

. . . Dick could almost see her there, putting the long-stemmed roses into the vase, dusting off the smoking-stand with her fluttering little hands. He could hear her lilting voice saying "Rikky-Tikky-Tavy, I need a new hat," or "Oh, Dick, why worry about the bills?"

He found himself staring at the telephone on its teakwood table in the hall.

. . . All he had to do was to give a number . . . tell Gloria that he wanted her. And in a few minutes she would be here. Here in his arms!

Dick walked slowly into the hall. He picked up the telephone and gave the familiar number of the Gordon home. He could hear Central ringing it. . . .

Then, resolutely, he snapped the receiver back on its hook, and set the little instrument down on the table.

He stood there looking at it. With his hand raised to his lips, he pressed Gloria's handkerchief hard against them. . . . That bit of cambric seemed to hold some of the fragrance of her in its scented folds. Her hair had smelled of mimosa flowers. . . .

Dick put out his hand again for the telephone. But suddenly, he snatched it back, as if the little black instrument had been flame.

There was subdued panic in the speed with which he snapped off the lights, and left the house. He flung himself into the little blue car, and backed it down the driveway. . . . "If I'd stayed a minute longer, I'd have called her up . . . told her to come!" he said disgustedly to himself, as the car rolled along the road.

He took out his watch and looked at it. Ten o'clock! . . . Too early to go to bed on a moonlit night like this.

He drove aimlessly around the dark streets where the trees made black shadows along the sides . . . every street a Lovers' Lane to-night! The same moon that had looked down on the lovers of Babylon and Nineveh looked down on the couples that were abroad to-night . . . the immortal Two, a Man and a Girl.

And then, almost without surprise, Dick found himself turning into the street where Gloria lived. He seemed to have known all along that this was where he was going. . . .

He passed the house, with his eyes straight ahead of him. But halfway down the street, he turned in his seat and looked back at the gray, blurred outlines of it. There was a light in the window of Gloria's room. . . .

The blue car slowed down and almost stopped. Its brakes screamed in the stillness of the street.

Then, suddenly, it shot forward in salient flight. Its tail-light winked like a small, evil eye as it turned the corner.

Not knowing whose car it was, Gloria heard it as she stood before her dresser, getting ready for bed.

She looked at herself in the mirror. . . . What was the good of all her beauty, she wondered, when Dick wasn't there to see it?

Her hair might just as well be drab instead of red gold in all its deep waves. And her mouth . . . why should it be shaped

for kisses, when he had grown tired of kissing her? . . . Gloria turned away her head, so that she couldn't see her reflection.

She put up her hand, and turned out the light, with a vicious little movement. Then she lay down on the bed, and tried to sleep. . . . It was past midnight before she finally dropped off.

The next morning dawned to the sound of slow dropping rain on the leaves outside her window.

She ran downstairs through the early Sunday morning hush of the house and brought in the newspaper. The "Help Wanted" columns . . . they were what she wanted.

She went quickly through them, and marked two or three that looked promising. She'd go downtown first thing in the morning, and find something to do. . . . That was the thing, to keep busy! To keep from thinking!

When she heard her mother moving around in the kitchen, she dressed and hurried downstairs to help her.

"We won't have much for breakfast . . . just some berries and toast and coffee, I thought," Mrs. Gordon said. "Your Aunt Dorcas always has such big dinners that we'll all be sick if we eat too much, now. . . ."

With a shudder, Gloria remembered that they were going to Aunt Dorcas' house for dinner!

At one o'clock they went. Aunt Dorcas, flushed and beaming, welcomed them with her best manner as Head of the House. Uncle Henry, small and silent, stood behind her.

And as Head of the House, Aunt Dorcas took her place behind the platter of stuffed, roasted veal at the dinner table. Aunt Dorcas always carved, just as she always drove the family car.

Cousin Lulu and her young husband, George, were there, too. The New Baby, they explained, was taking her nap upstairs on Aunt Dorcas' bed.

"What are you going to name her?" Gloria asked innocently.

Lulu and Aunt Dorcas turned reproachful eyes upon her.

"We're going to name her Dorcas, of course," Lulu said. "Why, she's the living image of Mother . . . hair and eyes, and all!"

Once more Aunt Dorcas beamed. Even the Baby had deferred to her as Head of the House. And all was well.

Gloria was afraid of Aunt Dorcas. "I do hope she doesn't get started on me and Dick again," she said prayerfully to

herself, as she ate the hot cherry pie that followed the meal.

But she soon found out that what The Family had really come together for was a council. Aunt Dorcas, with her finest military air, took the floor the minute they were all settled in the living-room.

"Your mother tells me you've gone back to work, Gloria," she began severely. "What's the meaning of that?"

Gloria drew in her breath. "Why shouldn't I work, Aunt?" she asked. "I'm used to working."

"Doesn't this young Gregory intend to give you a red cent?" Aunt Dorcas went on with her investigation.

"He's sent me money . . . but I gave it back to him. I didn't want it," Gloria answered in a low tone. She could feel the blood rising to her cheeks.

Aunt Dorcas looked at her with disgust. "Well, you are easy," she exclaimed, "to let a man treat you the way Dick Gregory has. . . . And then to let him go scot-free without giving you any money at all! You are a ninny!"

Gloria said nothing.

"What are you going to do about it?" her aunt prodded her. "Don't you realize that it's no more than right that you should take his money. You're his wife!"

"Yes, and if Gloria divorces Dick she ought to get good, fat alimony!" Cousin Lulu broke in shrilly. "She's a fool not to start suit to-morrow!"

Gloria felt her mother's tender, wounded eyes pass over her. She heard her voice, soft and low after Aunt Dorcas' strident tones.

"No, there won't be any divorce," that soft voice said. "Such a thing as divorce has never been in this family. . . . There isn't anything for Gloria to do that I can see. . . ."

"There are several things she can do!" declared Aunt Dorcas. She was like a lawyer giving an opinion. "She can sue young Gregory for alimony. Or she can go back to him if she wants to."

She stopped suddenly. Gloria had risen and she stood facing them with fiery cheeks and eyes that were too bright.

"Haven't I told you before that's the one thing I can't do!" she cried out. "I've been on my knees to Dick to take me back, if you must know! And he won't have me back! He's sick and tired of me! Don't I know. . . ."

Aunt Dorcas nodded her large blond head. "Then there's

more to this affair of yours than anybody knows," she remarked sagely. "People don't separate unless one of 'em is in love with somebody else. . . ."

She studied Gloria with her prominent blue eyes, as if she could read her thoughts if only she looked at her long enough.

The girl knew she couldn't bear to be in the room a moment longer. It was none of her aunt's business whether she took money from Dick or earned it typewriting!

And it certainly was nobody's affair whether she lived with Dick, but his and hers. . . .

She looked from her aunt to her cousin Lulu with hostile eyes. "They don't want to help me, anyway," she told herself the brutal truth. "They just want to find out all my business . . . so they can talk me over afterward!"

She turned swiftly toward the wide doorway that led out into the hall of the house. "I've got to go," she said wildly. "I promised May Seymour I'd go for a walk with her. . . ."

It wasn't until she was out on the sidewalk that she realized that May Seymour wasn't in town . . . probably never would be in town again!

"Oh, well, what if they do know that I fibbed to them?" she thought, furiously. "People who pry into every one's business don't deserve the truth. . . ."

But she hated herself for lying.

She walked slowly away from the house where The Family were still holding their counsel. She imagined her Aunt Dorcas' rich voice saying: "Well, Gloria's having what old Aunt Fanny used to call the 'high strikes'! She's always so excitable. Can't talk over anything calmly!"

Glad of her escape, and soothed by her long walk in the sunshine, Gloria turned into the park.

There were the usual Sunday crowds here scattering newspapers, bread-crusts and egg-shells from their picnic baskets on the yellow-green grass.

With her eyes on the dusty, blinding ground, she walked on through the intense midsummer heat. At last she found an empty bench under a lilac tree, and sank down upon it, exhausted. She closed her eyes. . . .

She dreamed that she was in the hall of her own house . . . her house and Dick's . . . and that he was there with her.

But between them, there seemed to be a high wall of fog. And in her dream, Gloria was trying to pull the wall down,

while Dick watched her . . . gravely, just as he might have stood, looking at her, had the dream been life, itself.

The sense of his nearness was so real to Gloria that when she wakened and opened her eyes, suddenly, she wasn't startled by the man who stood beside her bench. It was Dick, himself!

"You!" Gloria said to him, thickly. "I was just dreaming about you . . . I guess I was asleep."

"You guess you were? You know you were!" Dick answered. "If I had been a thief I could have got away with this." He handed her her little bead bag which had dropped to the ground.

"I suppose it's full of your week's wages," he added, dropping down onto the bench beside her. "Or didn't you get a job? Were you just bluffing me when you said you were going back to work?"

"Did you ever hear of Ulysses X. Forgan?" Gloria asked, turning her soft eyes to Dick.

He nodded. "Of course. . . . Everybody in town knows Forgan. Rich old duck," he answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I was his stenographer all last week," Gloria explained simply. "Did you really think I was drawing the long bow when I said I was going back to work?"

Dick said nothing.

"I quit my job yesterday, however," Gloria added. She waited for Dick to ask her why she had given up her position. She wanted to tell him how Ulysses X. had come to court her . . . so that he'd know she was attractive to other men even if her own husband no longer cared to live with her!

But he remained silent, staring straight ahead of him at a bed of dusty, tired-looking flowers.

Gloria wanted to lean over and stroke his hand. But on second thought she decided against it. He looked so stern.

"Poor Dick!" she said suddenly. "We've made a fine hash of things, haven't we?"

At that he turned and spoke. "We?" he asked.

"I . . . I've made a wreck of your life," Gloria corrected herself. "You might have had a nice wife to love you, and children. . . ."

Dick gave a short laugh, and lapsed into silence again.

"What you really should have done," Gloria went on thoughtfully, "was to marry Susan Briggs. She's an awfully nice, good woman even if she is terribly homely. And she would

have made you comfortable and contented to her dying day . . . or yours. Wouldn't she?"

Dick concealed a smile. "Susan's not so terribly homely," he said. "I think she's rather above the average in looks. Yes, and she'd make any man a good wife."

That maddened Gloria. "How do you know she would?" she asked crossly. "Just because she knows how to handle a typewriter doesn't prove that she could run a house . . . or a husband, either! I'll bet she can't make coffee like mine!"

She looked at him, daring him to defend Susan Briggs.

"I can make wonderful coffee. My mother's giving me cooking lessons," she added.

"What's the big idea? . . . Are you getting ready for your second marriage?" Dick asked, sarcastically.

Gloria slowly shook her head. "There won't be any second marriage for me, Dick," she said. "This is my only venture. . . . Do you know, it's almost two weeks since we separated?"

She saw his brows draw down in a scowl. "It's longer than that," he said. "It's almost two months since you ran away from home to follow Stanley Wayburn down to New York!"

Gloria bit her lip. "Oh, won't you ever forget that?" she asked impatiently. "That was just a kid trick. . . . I wasn't half so wild about Stanley Wayburn as I was about New York. And I wanted to get even with you for going away on that trip and leaving me behind!"

"If I could believe that . . ." Dick began.

Gloria waited breathlessly, but he said nothing more. Presently he took a book from the pocket of his coat and opened it. He began to read.

Gloria rose and held out her hand. "I must go," she said. "It's getting late. . . ."

Then she sat down again. "I really ought to go," she murmured. But she knew that so long as Dick was there she could not leave. Invisible chains held her to that bench. . . . It was good just to be near him again.

"I showed a couple of people our house last week," Dick remarked presently, without raising his eyes from his book. "I hope they'll buy the furniture, too."

Gloria set her teeth. "It's too bad you can't get rid of the house as easily as you got rid of me, isn't it?" she asked, watching his face. But it was as blank as that of a good poker player or a Hindu.

"I hate the thought of other people living in our house with our things," Gloria went on, after a few minutes. "I don't want anybody to take naps on my chaise longue, or sit in your armchair. . . . I don't want any man but you to use that little red smoking-stand of yours. . . ."

Her voice broke. She fought hard to keep back the tears that welled up into her eyes

"You broke into the house the other day, didn't you?" Dick asked, suddenly.

Gloria nodded.

"Why?"

She shook her head. She knew that if she tried to talk she would burst into tears.

CHAPTER XLVII

It was almost sunset, and picnickers who had come to the park for supper walked past them with baskets on their arms. Somehow or other the women were better looking than the men. Perhaps it was their ready-made smartness. . . .

But anyway beside Dick the men looked flabby and weedy to Gloria . . . or else too fat and solid. . . . Why, she wondered, had she never seen how much better he was to look at than any other man alive?

"Not that he's so handsome," she remarked to herself, "but he's so . . . himself!" She loved him for the simple fact that he was Dick. For his face, because it couldn't by any possibility be anybody else's . . . and for his mind that was so utterly sound and decent.

"It took me a long time to find it out," Gloria went on thinking, "but I know it at last, now, when it would be better if I didn't!"

Wasn't that just like Life, though? It was full of such tricks. . . . Giving you what you wanted just a little too late? Like a Valentine coming the morning after Valentine's day . . . and in a plain envelope!

Gloria rose. "Well, this time I'm really going," she said, unsteadily.

Dick rose with her, and they walked slowly out of the park together . . . close together as lovers walk, and yet worlds apart!

The following day, Gloria started to go job-hunting again. A slip of paper with two or three "want ads" on it was folded away in her purse along with three ten-dollar bills . . . her last week's salary.

She walked along the street looking in the shop windows. The hats, as always, lured her. So did the crisp summer dresses, with their sashes and lace.

In a window of a department store was a display of luster

bowls . . . lovely orange and sea-blue ones. "The very thing for the mantel in the living-room!" Gloria exclaimed, looking at one that glowed like the sunrise.

Then, with a jerk, her brain told her that the living-room no longer belonged to her. Dick was going to sell it and everything in it to a couple who were looking at the house . . . that is, if he could.

Gloria walked on down the street.

She didn't feel at all like going up into one of the great office buildings to ask for a position. She felt like "Mrs. Richard Gregory" that morning . . . and she couldn't step into the rôle of "Gloria Gordon," looking for a place to work.

She didn't want to work in an office. She wanted to go back to her own house. She told herself truthfully that she had felt "like a fish out of water" every minute since she had packed up her trunks and left Dick.

At the street corner she met little blond Mrs. Wing.

To Gloria's amazement she came up to her and seized both hands. "Hello, Gloria Gregory!" she cried. "It's so nice to see you again! . . . Where have you been keeping yourself, for goodness' sake? . . . Just the other day the girls were asking what had become of you?"

Gloria stared at her in astonishment.

She remembered perfectly the night when she had tried to speak to Mrs. Wing, and Mrs. Wing turned away her little blond head.

But why hold that against her? . . . It was nice to have friends, and it warmed Gloria's heart to have Mrs. Wing welcome her this way. People were queer, inexplicable things, but they were also necessary to each other.

So Gloria smiled back. "I've been down in New York the last few weeks," she said grandly.

"Did you hear about May Seymour's husband?" Mrs. Wing asked. "Terrible thing, wasn't it?"

"Dreadful," Gloria agreed. "And poor May's left town. Did you know that?"

Mrs. Wing nodded. "The best thing she could do under the circumstances," she said wisely. "I never could see what you saw in May Seymour. She was so rattle-brained and—well, call it unconventional. That's the kindest word for her."

She pressed Gloria's hand when she left her. "Now, do come to see me," she said warmly. "Won't you?"

"It's a cinch she doesn't know I've left Dick, or she wouldn't be so cordial," Gloria told herself.

"Little hypocrite!" she added to herself. She stood there in the sunshine, thinking.

"What a fool I am!" she said inwardly, after a minute or two. "Just because Dick doesn't want to live with me is no reason why I should give up my home, and go back to a job that I hate! I guess I'd rather be a housekeeping woman like Mrs. Wing or Mother than the best stenographer on earth!"

Five minutes later she was in Dick's office. She knew that it was the time when he went out to lunch.

Miss Briggs, very white in her dark blue dress, sat at her desk.

"How do you do," Gloria greeted her coldly. "I came up here to get the key of my house. I gave it to Mr. Gregory a few days ago. Do you know where he keeps it?"

Without a word Susan Briggs got up and went into Dick's office. Gloria could hear her opening and shutting drawers, and rustling papers as she searched through Dick's desk.

Presently she came out with a dozen keys in the palm of her outstretched hand.

"Is any of these the key you want?" she asked as she threw them on the table.

Gloria picked them up. Her own key was among them. She put it into her purse.

"I don't know whether I ought to give you that key or not," Miss Briggs said. "Mr. Gregory didn't say I could."

Gloria glared at her. "It's none of Mr. Gregory's affair, Miss Briggs," she said. "The key belongs to me!"

Gloria flounced out of the office without even thanking Miss Briggs for the key. She put it into the coin-purse in her bag, and started home.

On the porch of her mother's little house stood an empty baby buggy, filled with soft blue pillows and robes.

Gloria groaned. "I suppose Aunt Dorcas and Cousin Lulu have dropped in for lunch," she said to herself.

It seemed impossible to face the pair again . . . with their eyes that searched her for a sign of weakness. But to her relief, only Lulu was in the living-room of the house.

"Well," she greeted Gloria. "Did you get over your peeve yesterday?" She giggled nervously.

"All over it," Gloria answered, tossing her hat down on the

table that stood between the windows. An open handbag stood there, too. It was filled with infant's lingerie and nursing bottles.

"I suppose that is the wonderful baby," Gloria said, looking at the small white bundle in Lulu's arms. "May I see her? I haven't yet, you know."

"Sit down in that chair and I'll let you hold her," Lulu offered generously. Gloria sat down in a chair by the sunny window and held up her arms for The New Baby.

Lulu laid the small, warm thing in her arms, and for the first time that she could remember, Gloria knew what it was like to hold a baby. . . . It was utterly unlike anything she had ever known, before—the feeling of compassion and tenderness that stirred in her heart.

She was afraid she was going to cry. And when she smiled up at Lulu her eyes were wet and starry with unshed tears.

"Lulu," she said slowly, "I . . . I should like to have a baby of my own, I think!"

The baby stirred in her arms, and laid its wee starfish of a hand against her breast.

"It's a blessing it's got hair," she said airily to hide the emotion that almost choked her. "So many of 'em are bald as billiard balls . . ."

She scowled down, sullen-sweet, at The New Baby, and gave it back to its mother.

Then she ran upstairs to pack her trunks. "Where's Mother? . . . Up here?" she called to Cousin Lulu as she ran.

Her mother's voice answered her from the "spare" bedroom.

"I'm in here, looking up some old baby clothes of yours to give to Lulu," she said. "The poor child hasn't made a single flannel petticoat for that blessed baby. . . . My goodness, the women nowadays! They don't want their babies to wear any more clothes than they wear themselves!"

She looked disapprovingly at Gloria's short-sleeved wisp of a dress, as she stood lightly poised on the threshold.

"I thought you were going to work to-day," she remarked.

Gloria smiled and tilted back her head. "No, I'm going home, Mother," she said, her eyes gleaming like amber through the thick lashes that fringed them.

Her mother turned sharply toward her. "Have you seen Dick?" she asked. "Have you made up with him?"

Gloria laughed. "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no

fibs," she said. "And don't say a word to Cousin Lulu or Aunt Dorcas about what I'm doing. . . . Will you?"

At five o'clock when Gloria had finished packing, she telephoned for a taxicab . . . an unheard-of luxury.

"I wish I knew what you're up to, Gloria," her mother said anxiously as she kissed her good-by. "If you've made up with Dick I think you might tell me, at least."

Gloria smiled and kissed her. "Don't worry about me, Motherkin," she said. "I always land on my feet, don't I?"

Her mother shook her head doubtfully. "I'd feel better if I knew just what you're doing. . . . You have such wild impulses, Gloria," she said.

But Gloria, herself, didn't know quite what she was doing. She knew simply this: that she couldn't spend another night under her father's roof. She was homesick . . . and she was going home. That was all there was to it.

She stopped the taxicab before a grocery store and went in. She took out the money she had earned the week before, and bought tomatoes and bread and lemons.

"Tomato sandwiches and lemonade," she said to herself. That was the beautifying breakfast the heroine of a Scott Fitzgerald novel had eaten, while her husband was away at war.

"I'm a sort of war-widow, myself," Gloria added mentally. "I suppose a family quarrel is a war just as well as one between nations." She sighed, dismally.

But her spirits lifted when the cab turned in at the driveway of her own house. She turned her head away so that she didn't see the "For Sale" sign as they swept past it.

The house smelled musty.

Gloria threw open the windows and doors. She took off her hat, and ran out into the back yard to pick some of the late roses that glowed among the leaves of the bushes.

She filled bowls and vases with them, and turned on all the lamps in the living-room. The house began to feel home-like and happy again. . . .

There came a sound of footsteps on the back porch.

The Donberg twins stood there, peering in through the screen door. Their noses were flattened against the wire netting.

"Hello," one of them said. "We're glad you're home again, We like you."

"Because you're pretty," the other added, solemnly.

"You mustn't like people because they're pretty," Gloria told

them. "You must like folks because they're nice and good . . . like your mother."

"Aren't you nice and good?" asked one twin.

"Well, no. . . . But I can tell fairy stories," Gloria answered. "Come over to-morrow and I'll tell you one about a poor girl who was bewitched by an ogre."

She thought of herself and Stan Wayburn. In his own sleek, dapper way, Stan had been a sort of ogre. He certainly had bewitched her, after a fashion— Oh, well, what was the use thinking about it?

"Look here, infants," she said, suddenly. "Run over and ask your mother if I can borrow a piece of ice from her. Just a little piece . . . enough for a pitcher of lemonade."

The pair dashed down the steps, racing to see who could reach home first, to be the proud bearer of the borrowed ice.

In a few minutes the light tapping of high heels came across the porch. The twins' mother stood there, holding a large lump of ice in one hand and a covered plate in the other.

"Hello, there," she called cheerfully. "What are you doing here? I thought you and your nice husband had gone away for good."

"Oh, I just came back to pack up some things," Gloria put her off. "And I thought while I was here, I'd get a bite to eat."

Mrs. Donberg laughed. "I've brought you another bite," she said, uncovering the plate. "Some devil's food cake I baked this morning. Mr. Donberg has such a sweet tooth. . . . Dessert's the whole meal to him!"

A month ago Gloria would have sneered inwardly at her neighbor's chatter. But now she listened with interest. . . . She had found out the joy that lies in putting a good meal on the table for a well-loved husband!

There was as much romance in cooking corned-beef-and-cabbage as there was in writing a love letter. It all depended upon the person for whom you cooked it!

"If I hadn't made such a mess of things I might be getting dinner for Dick myself, right this minute . . . waiting for him to come home," she thought regretfully, as she peeled her tomatoes.

It wasn't until after she had eaten her lonely meal and put the dishes away that she began to wonder why she had come there to the house that seemed still to be alive with Dick,

"I ought to go back to Mother's," she told herself. "There's no point in getting soft and sentimental about Dick now, when he hates me. . . . If I had any sense I'd divorce him and forget him, I suppose. There must be some one else somewhere who could make me happy."

But she knew there wasn't anybody else who could.

She closed and locked the doors and windows of the house and went upstairs.

Her own room . . . with its silk curtains rustling in the night wind. . . . Ah, it was the sanctuary she needed! Away from every one who would question her or give her advice.

To-morrow she'd brace up and get a job. She'd face the world, and whatever was ahead of her. But to-night she'd stay here, hidden and at peace. . . .

She thought of the months before her marriage when she and Dick had come here every day to watch the builders at their work of making a home for just the two of them! . . . She remembered how Dick had watched her as she went around the half-finished house, planning the furniture that was to go into it. He had loved her then! . . . Could it be possible that he had no feeling at all for her now?

"I'm going to telephone him right now and tell him to come here! I want to see him!" Gloria said suddenly, moved by an impulse stronger than herself,

CHAPTER XLVIII

SHE called the number of the old Gregory residence. "What'll I say to him?" she thought in panic, as she waited for him to answer. "I haven't any excuse for seeing him, have I?"

But to her intense relief, it was not Dick's voice, but Mother Gregory's, that answered the phone.

"This is Gloria speaking," the girl said. "Is Dick there, please?"

"No, he's not!" Mother Gregory's full voice snapped off the words. "He came home to dinner, but he's gone out for the evening."

"All right . . . good-by," Gloria faltered.

"Wait a minute!" Mother Gregory cried. "I want to say a word to you, Gloria. . . . I think you'd better not telephone Dick again. There's no use in keeping him stirred up all the time. . . . You two have agreed to disagree, and you'd better stick to it!"

Gloria had no answer.

"Glo-ree-a, did you hear me?" Dick's mother asked, after a moment.

"Yes," she heard Gloria whisper. And she hung up the receiver.

Mother Gregory turned away from the telephone to meet Dick coming in from the back yard. "Why, I thought you'd gone!" she said in surprise. "And I just told a fib without knowing it. . . . Gloria called up, and I said you'd gone out for the evening."

Dick considered. "I guess it's just as well you did," he said after a time. "We don't get anywhere talking things over. It's just a waste of time."

His mother drew a long breath that caused all the black jet beads to heave on her vast bosom. "I certainly am glad to hear you say that!" she declared. "Your father and I have been afraid you'd go back to her, all along. She's not the woman for you, Dick, and never was!"

Dick twirled his hat in his hands. "I came back here for my brief-case," he said. "Have you seen it?"

His mother walked into the living-room and returned with it in her capable hands. "'A place for everything and everything in its place,'" she quoted. "If you'd only put that brief-case on the hall table, you'd always know where it was! . . . Where are you going?"

"Down to the office," Dick answered shortly.

His mother followed him out onto the wide side-porch that overlooked the driveway and the back yard.

"Now don't be silly and call Gloria up," she said, as he bent to kiss her good-by.

"She probably didn't want to say much of anything, anyway," Dick answered. "But I think I'll give her a ring, and see what she wanted."

He resented his mother's advice. Didn't she realize that he was a grown man well over thirty? Or did mothers always feel that way about their sons—that they were still little boys?

. . . At the first drugstore, Dick stopped, and went in to telephone his wife, at her mother's house.

"Why, Gloria's not here!" Mrs. Gordon said, when she answered the phone. "Don't you know where she is?"

"How should I know?" Dick asked helplessly. "When did she leave the house?"

"About five o'clock."

"Well, she called me about an hour ago," Dick said. "When she comes home ask her to call me at my office, will you?"

. . . He climbed into his car, and drove downtown at break-neck speed, so as not to miss Gloria's next telephone message when she called again. That is, if she did call again.

He unlocked the door of his office and went in. Miss Briggs was sitting at her desk, with her long white hands draped over the keys of her typewriter. She looked as if she had been sitting that way a long time.

"I thought I told you not to work late these hot nights, Susy!" Dick said severely, closing the outer door behind him.

"I'm not working," Miss Briggs answered, dully. "And it's not late. Only eight o'clock."

As she spoke a clock somewhere across the roofs of the city chimed eight.

"Has Mrs. Gregory called up here, to-night, for me?" was Dick's next question.

Miss Briggs shook her smooth brown head. "No," she said, almost inaudibly.

She sat motionless. Only her blue eyes moved as she watched him take off his hat, and hang it up. He picked up his brief case from the chair where he had laid it, and turned toward his private office.

Sue Briggs could see that there was a sort of restlessness upon him. He seemed to be waiting feverishly for something vital—stupendous.

"Be sure to call me if she does phone," he said, as he went into his office.

In a minute or two he came out again.

"Call up Mrs. Gregory's mother, and ask if she's there, please," he said. "You know the number, don't you?"

Miss Briggs knew the number. She had called it scores of times for Dick during the months he had been engaged to Gloria. . . . It had always hurt abominably to call that number. It hurt her now . . . like an old wound.

But she gave the number in a brisk cheerful voice.

"No, she hasn't come in," she reported to Dick. "Her mother says she doesn't know when to expect her."

Dick ran his hand through his dark hair. "But, good Lord! Where is she?" he asked, unaware that he spoke aloud.

Susan Briggs cleared her throat.

"Mrs. Gregory came into the office this morning to see you," she said, huskily.

Dick wheeled. "Why didn't you tell me?" he asked sharply. "Where was I when she was here?"

"You had just gone out to lunch," Susan Briggs answered. "And—and I forgot to tell you about it."

A tell-tale blush mounted to her face. She had not forgotten to tell Dick! . . . She hadn't wanted to tell him about Gloria's visit. And Dick knew it.

She looked at him with her unspoken misery in her eyes.

"I suppose I ought to tell you something, Mr. Gregory," she said, after a moment. "I was just going to telephone you about it when you came in to-night."

Dick waited silently for her to go on.

"I don't know whether I should have done it . . . but I gave Mrs. Gregory the key of your house to-day," she said at last.

"Did she ask you for it?" Dick asked.

Susan Briggs nodded.

"Well, I'll bet that's where she is then . . . at the house!" Dick exclaimed. His eyes lighted.

"I wouldn't wonder," Sue Briggs answered dryly. It took all of her nerve, her gallantry, to say those three small words in just that tone.

From under her lashes she saw Dick go into his office. She heard the creak of his swivel chair as he sat down in it. Then there was a long silence. . . .

She knew that he was making up his mind whether to go to his wife, or not . . . his wife who was waiting for him in the house that was his and hers.

Not daring to move, Susan Briggs sat there. She knew that the happiness of all her life depended upon whether Dick stayed there at the office or went to Gloria, that night.

. . . And so certain was she of his decision that presently she began to put on her hat to go home.

As she stood before the mirror tucking a stray wisp of hair behind her ear, Dick came out of his office. He carried his hat and his inevitable brief-case was under his arm.

"Good night, Susy," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice as he went out. He did not notice that she had made no answer.

Miss Briggs stood there where he had left her, with her hands still holding the brim of her hat. She did not move until the sound of his retreating footsteps died away down the corridor of the building.

Then she opened the drawers of her desk and took all the things that were hers from them. Pitifully few they were. Tablets and pencils, a small box of talcum powder, a face-towel, and an old candy-box full of odds and ends.

She looked around the room where she had worked for so many years . . . as if she were trying to print it on her memory. And yet she knew it was the one place in the world that she never would be able to forget!

She took off her hat with a jerky, impatient movement, and sat down at her desk. After a moment she put a sheet of clean white paper into her typewriter, and began to write.

"Dear Mr. Gregory:" she began and could go no further. . . .

What could she say to him? The truth was impossible.

She couldn't write to tell the man she loved that she wasn't

going to work for him any more because he was in love with his wife and not with her!

She couldn't tell him that her heart was broken, and that there never would be any happiness anywhere for her again. And yet that was the truth! . . . Anything else was a lie.

Well, then, she would have to tell him a lie.

She raised her hands above the machine, held them poised there an instant, and then wrote rapidly: "I am taking this opportunity to tell you that I am resigning my position at once for one where I will receive a larger salary.

"Sincerely yours,

"SUSAN BRIGGS."

She neither dated it nor sealed it . . . just laid it in the wire basket on Dick's desk, where he would be sure to see it first thing in the morning.

As she turned to go out of his office, she brushed against his old office coat hanging against the wall. It smelled of the tobacco he smoked in that villainous pipe of his. The sleeves of it still held the shape of his arms. . . .

Susan Briggs put her arms around it, hugging it close to her breast, and laid her cheek against its rough tweed surface. Her mouth twisted, and a tear slid from under her closed eyelids.

Suddenly she loosened her hold of the coat, and let it swing back into place. She hurried out of the office.

In the outer room she picked up her belongings, snapped out the lights, and went.

A cleaning woman was mopping up the floor of the corridor. Behind her was a small girl with enormous black eyes and a mop of straight black hair. As Susan Briggs passed her, she held up her doll for her to admire.

"See Dolly?" she said. Miss Briggs brushed past her, and went on a few steps. Then she turned around, and saw the small girl's eyes. They were the eyes that all children have for strange and sudden cruelties . . . hurt and bewildered.

Susan ran back and pressed a nickel into the child's small grimy palm.

"Poor baby!" she said. Her eyes were blinded with tears as she went down the stairs and out of the building.

CHAPTER XLIX

GLORIA darkened the house, turned the key in her bedroom door, and lay down to try to go to sleep.

But it wasn't the kind of night for sleep. A ray of moonlight lay like a slim beckoning finger on the wall beside the bed. The darkness seemed to be filled with an expectant hush.

There was a high excitement in Gloria. She swung her naked feet over the side of the bed, and crossed the room to the window.

A large white moon hung low in the sky like a Japanese lantern. It turned the fluttering leaves of the poplar trees to silver spangles.

The world outside seemed unreal . . . disturbing in its beauty. But the lonely woman at the window hardened her heart against its magic. She had a feeling that the only way for her to go on was to harden her heart against everything . . . not only against things but against people. Against Dick—

She must never let the thought of him into her heart again, she told herself with a kind of dull anger.

And then she went on thinking about him.

Somewhere out there in the breathing night, he was.

And suddenly Gloria remembered another night when she had stood at another window and wondered where Dick was. That had been long ago . . . on the night before she had married him.

She remembered how he had driven up in the middle of the night, and whistled softly in the darkness for her . . . a low "Bob White" whistle. He had begged her to come downstairs for just a second to kiss him . . . and she had refused.

"What a fool I was!" she told herself. "And how glad I'd be now if he wanted to kiss me! How glad I'd be! . . . But there's no chance of that ever again. . . ."

The tears that she had felt in her eyes all day . . . and in her heart . . . overflowed. She dropped to her knees on the floor and laid her head down on the window sill and sobbed.

And then she seemed to hear a low whistle . . . a long, clear note followed by a shorter one. She held her breath and listened. . . . Was it Dick's "Bob White" call?

Oh, no, it couldn't be— And then it came again!

Gloria raised her head.

Down on the lawn in the shadow of the trees was a darker shadow. It detached itself and moved out into the moonlight. It was Dick!

Gloria's heart leaped in her breast. "Dick!" she said. And there was a note of relief and sudden happiness in her voice. "Come down and open the door," he said.

Without stopping to put on her kimono or slippers, Gloria ran across the room, and down through the darkened house where the moonlight lay in patches here and there on the walls.

She unlocked the door, and pattered out onto the porch. She stood there in the mingled radiance of the distant moon and a street lamp just in front of the house. . . .

Some passing neighbors stopped to stare as she threw herself into Dick's arms.

But neither she nor Dick saw them. For them in that moment they were oblivious of all the world . . . except themselves.

Dick's arms drew her up. He bent his head and kissed her as if he never would let her go.

Then, abruptly he freed her.

"I thought you never were going to kiss me again," Gloria said breathlessly. "You said you never would, you know!"

"We say a lot of things we don't mean in this world," Dick's voice answered her. He put his arm around her and drew her into the dark house.

His hand groped for the lights. Under their glare Gloria saw that his eyes were almost black in his haggard face. There were lines there that the last weeks had written indelibly.

"We do a lot of things we don't mean to do, too," Gloria faltered. "Life seems to carry us along like bubbles along a wave. . . . Dick, I've done a lot of things I haven't meant to do. . . ."

Dick made a gesture of finality. "Well, there's no use talking about it, now," he said. "Spilled milk, you know—"

He went into the living-room.

Gloria followed him. "Have you come home for good?" She was half afraid to ask him that.

And in an agony of uncertainty she watched him fill his pipe . . . waiting tremulously for his answer.

Slowly . . . as things seem to happen in a dream . . . she saw him strike a match, blow out its flame and lay it in the ash tray beside him.

"Well," he said finally, "it's this way, you see. This is the only place in the world where I feel at home, somehow or other. And I—can't get used to being without you."

Gloria laughed a little bitterly. "I'm a habit of yours . . . that you can't break. Is that it?" she asked. "The most deadly dull of all things . . . a habit?"

Dick shook his head. "No," he said. "It strikes deeper than that, Gloria. You're my woman. There are a lot of men who can love a score of women in their time. But I'm not one of them. I'm the kind of fool who can never care for more than one woman, I suppose. . . ."

"And am I that one woman for you?" Gloria asked. Her eyes were wide and eager. "Are you sure?"

Dick looked at her. His mouth tightened as he took her into the hard ring of his arms. "You are," he answered, and his voice was thick and tense.

Gloria leaned back into his arms, and looked at him. "Then I won't be jealous of Susan Briggs, any more, and I'll stop heckling you about her," she said.

Dick waited a moment before he answered. "I've an idea that Susan Briggs stopped working for me to-night," he said then, abruptly. "I don't know what makes me think so, but I do, somehow."

Gloria laughed. "She'll be right there when you get to the office to-morrow morning just as usual," she cried, "unless she knows you've come back to me!"

"I think she does know it." Dick's voice was grave. "But don't worry about her. You know I never cared about Susan Briggs . . . don't you?" He put his hands under her elbows and held her away from him.

"And I never cared about Stan Wayburn, either!" Gloria broke in shrilly. "I've thought it all out, Dick, these last two weeks. . . . He was just part of Jazz to me, like cocktails and dance music. I was hunting for a thrill, and he gave it to me. . . ."

Her small face with its uptilted lips sobered as she went

on: "He told me all the things I wanted to hear from you . . . how beautiful I was, and how I could knock him off his pins. Oh, Dick, we women need flattery and love . . . or love-making! It's our job, you know! To keep you men in love with us. . . ."

Dick laid his hand over her mouth. "All right, all right," he said impatiently. "And that about ends Stanley Wayburn and Susan Briggs, for good, doesn't it? . . . What I want to know just now is whether you're going to be contented with me from now on?"

"Contented? I'm going to be happier than any lark!" Gloria bubbled. "Why, it seems wonderful to me to be here in your arms again! I thought I'd lost you forever and ever, just when I found out how much I love you. . . ."

"Yes, but there's more than just love in this marriage business," Dick answered. "Love's only an occasional flash to brighten the whole. . . . You're going to have to do your own work, for I shall always be poor, I suppose. And there'll be worries, and illness. . . ."

"And babies, and bothers . . . and all the things that make life worth living!" Gloria went on. She had one of her penetrating flashes. "And I shall grow old and lose my looks, and you'll grow staid and pompous and prosperous," she went on with a wry little smile. "But we'll still love each other, won't we? . . . And let me tell you something . . . you'll have to set your foot down harder than you ever did before, with me! A woman loves a man to run her to a frazzle! If you'd done that in the beginning, I wouldn't have got into so much mischief!"

Dick threw back his head, and laughed. "Gloria, you're a wonder!" he said, his eyes twinkling. "I knew that, somehow or other, you'd lay all this trouble we've had on my doorstep. . . . Well, all right, it was my fault you got into mischief. What else did I do that I shouldn't have done?"

"Your technique as a husband was all wrong," Gloria made a sweeping gesture with one small dramatic hand. "You shouldn't have let me leave you and go home to my mother. . . . But, thank Heaven, we've both fallen on our feet! And we're here together, at last! . . . Oh, I can't believe it. I thought you were gone for good."

She drew his head down to hers.

. . . Ah, it was good to be here . . . to be held . . . to surrender herself! Gloria felt as if she were in a globe of happiness.

"Dick," she said, drowsily, contentedly, from the shelter of his arms. "Did you ever stop to think how nice it is for two people to care for just each other . . . and to have little children because of their caring so? Don't you think there's something very fine and sweet about it?"

Dick held her closer. "Of course, I do," he answered. "I've been trying to tell you that all along, Flapper. But you never would believe it before, would you?"

She shook her head. "Oh, my dear, to think that I almost lost you!" she cried, half strangling him with her arms. Most surprisingly, she burst into a storm of tears.

"What a simp I am to cry like this!" she sobbed against his coat. "What am I doing it for when I'm so h-happy?"

Dick patted her soft hair. "There, there, cry all you want to!" he said. "I know. . . . I understand."

He raised her hidden face, and kissed the tremulous scarlet mouth . . . the wet, white eyelids. Then he moved away from her toward the outer door.

"Where are you going now?" Gloria cried in foolish panic.

"Just out doors, for a second," Dick answered. "Wait here for me. . . . I want to pull that 'For Sale' sign out of the front lawn!"

And so the story of Gloria, the Flapper Wife, ends. And the modern chronicle of Gloria, the Wife and Mother, begins.

We say to-day that we have a New Woman, who votes and drives her own car, who plays golf and . . . sometimes . . . smokes a cigarette. But she's not a New Woman, at all! At heart, she is the same woman who brought up her stalwart young in a cave; who reared them in log cabins on the New England coast three centuries ago; who took them with her into the Covered Wagons that were part of a westward-moving army almost a hundred years before our times!

. . . And she is the same woman everywhere, whether you find her in an igloo in an Eskimo village or in many-towered Manhattan . . . or in the romantic islands of the Southern seas!

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